

A Spirited and Graphic Story.—Complete in this No.

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"I WOULD RATHER FOLLOW YOU TO THE GRAVE, NORA, THAN LIVE TO BE ASHAMED OF YOU!" SAID JULIAN, WITH CONVICTION

Princess Hildegarde.

By F. B.,

Author of "Phillipa's Father," etc., etc.

[A NOVELETTE.]

COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.

CHAPTER I.

"AND so you are really leaving us?" said one of a bevy of school-girls. "How strange the place will be without you?"

"Perfectly horrid!" said another, "and

the daily procession will not be half so imposing without the princess! I wish I were going too!"

"I wonder what your guardian is like? I hope she will be very nice!" cried a third; and then the subject of these remarks, speaking for the first time, said,—

"I wish with all my heart I could stay among you. We have been very happy together, and Miss Collett has been like a mother to me!"

"She's a darling!" lisped a pretty brunette. "There never was another governess like her! I used to think school would be horrid; but I changed my mind as soon as I saw her and heard her voice. Oh! Hildegarde, I wonder if we shall ever meet again?"

"I hope so! If I may I shall ask you girls to Lesley in turns."

"How delightful! And you will write often? Look here, girls, let us make a promise to this effect: that whoever marries first shall invite all the others to dance at her wedding!"

Hildegarde smiled.

"Who is contemplating marriage? And how are we to be sure that we shall all live to be 'wooded and married and a'?"

She moved to a window and stood looking out, whilst her companions, respecting her mood, and sad at heart because of the coming parting, watched her with loving eyes.

They called her familiarly "the princess," and "Princess Hildegarde," because of her

Next Week "Tempest Tossed." Complete Story.

queenly beauty and royally generous ways, and as she stood in the spring sunshine one felt that the title was her due. At eighteen she was tall and splendidly proportioned, had an air of easy grace rare in one so young; and the proud, pure face, lit up by grand grey eyes, was perfect in feature and colouring. The shapely head was crowned by masses of yellow-brown hair, which in the sunlight shone like burnished gold.

With a sudden gesture, expressive of pain and regret, she turned towards her companions.

"Oh, girls! girls!" she said, in a low voice, more stirred by passion than ever they had heard it before, "I cannot tell you what this parting means to me! It is the breaking of all old ties, the going to a new and untried life. My heart and my courage fail me, and I grow weak as a child when I think that perhaps I shall never see your dear faces again! I would thank you for all your love and kindness, but I do not know how!"

For the first time in their lives they saw tears in her eyes; and the quivering lip, the palling cheek, told all too plainly how deep was her emotion. The little brunette burst into sobs and clung carelessly about her. There was not one who did not in some way give token of love and grief. And seeing their pain helped Hildegard's hope to bear her own. With a superb gesture, indicative of contempt of her own weakness, but never of theirs, she dashed away her tears.

"Come, wish me good-bye," she said in her usual tone, "and let me go. Partings are always painful!"

The door opened even as she spoke, and the principal appeared.

"Come, my dear," she said, gently, "it is time you dressed."

"I am coming, Miss Collett," and then in silence she kissed her companions—she dared not attempt speech—and tearing herself from their loving hold followed Miss Collett to the little room she had called her own for five long, happy years.

Miss Collett helped her to dress with kindly hands. She herself was not unmoved; and when the girl's simple toilet was complete, she put her arms about her, and laying her hand upon her shoulder as though in blessing, said,—

"My dear and favourite pupil, I shall miss you sorely; but you will not forget me, or the rules by which I would have you govern your life. I cannot tell what lies before you! I hope your path will be smooth; but if trouble comes be brave and strong. You know where to go for help, and never, never be guilty of deceit or meanness. Remember what you owe to Heaven and yourself! And now, dear, let us go!"

"One moment please. Let me wish you good-bye here—not on the platform. Oh, Miss Collett, I will try to do as you would have me, to remember what you are, and make my life noble as yours. Kiss me good-bye. I—I cannot bear much more."

The gentle beautiful face of the elder woman was bowed a moment on the young girl's head; then each looked into the others eyes; then followed a close and clinging caress. The next moment they went slowly downstairs, and presently were driven away from Gwydir House.

Very few words passed between them on their way to the station, and the parting on the platform was strictly conventional; but the governess went back to her home sad at heart, and the pupil sped on her way with heavy forebodings as to the future.

So long ago that she could not remember one line of her mother's face Mrs. Hope had died; and her father, then in India, being

engrossed in his pursuit of riches, had no time to devote to the baby Hildegard. So he consigned her to the care of Mrs. Selwyn, a distant relative, who did her duty by proxy.

She had placed the child first at one school and then another, until, five years since, Mr. Hope dying, left his daughter a great heiress, and Mrs. Selwyn at once removed her from the very indifferent "seminary" where she then was, and placed her with Miss Collett.

The girl had never had any vacations, and never known the sweetness and rest of home, and Miss Collett was as a revelation to her.

Under her firm but gentle guidance all that was best and noblest in Hildegard grew and flourished amazingly.

The pride which now was beautiful in her would have grown a hideous thing under less loving watchfulness and care. The scorn of natures lower and weaker than her own was tempered now with pity; and as the governess sat alone in her room that night she said aloud,—

"Thank Heaven, I can trust her. Whatever comes she will retain her innate purity and truth!"

And Miss Collett was right.

The journey to Lesley was a long one, and Hildegard was very tired before it ended. Day was closing in before the train crept along the little platform; but there was sufficient light for the girl to see her guardian was waiting her. A thin, plain, middle-aged lady, beautifully dressed, stood scanning the passengers as they alighted, and catching sight of Hildegard advanced smilingly.

"My dear, how excellent your portrait was!" she said, effusively. "I could not possibly be mistaken in your identity having seen that!" and she kissed the proud, young face with every appearance of affection. "I am afraid you are very weary; the journey is so tedious and intricate."

"I am tired," Hildegard answered, coldly, for something in Mrs. Selwyn's manner displeased and repelled her, "and the journey involved so many changes that I grew bewildered and heartily wished for an escort."

Mrs. Selwyn shot a keen glance at her from under her level black brows before she said,—

"Ah, yes, my love, that is natural! and but for my wretched nerves I should have travelled to Consey, just to have the pleasure of bringing you here. Darnley, my son, is far too young to act as escort to a beautiful girl. Do you know how grandly lovely you are, my dear?"

"I know I am not plain, but I would rather not have that fact impressed upon me. It might make me unpleasantly pleased with myself."

Mrs. Selwyn bit her lip, thinking the while,—

"What a young barbarian! How on earth shall I ever understand her!" What she said was,—

"My dear, you are wise! Beauty is not the greatest of good things," and with that she led the way to a handsomely appointed carriage, drawn by a pair of beautiful bays.

"I hope you will be very happy with us," she went on, as they bowed towards Cecilia House. "We are quiet people, but there are some good families round us, and Darnley is a host in himself. Then, too, I have a young companion who can share your walks and doubtless has many tastes identical with your own."

For the first time Hildegard looked interested.

"What is he?" she asked.

"Nora Marston. Rather pretty, is it not? Her father was a clergyman; her brother, a well-meaning but plain young man, is a captain in the Dragoons. But they are awfully poor. I don't suppose, beside his pay, Captain Marston has a penny piece. What little property there was went to Nora."

"How old is she?"

"Oh, not more than twenty, quite a pretty girl too! I assure you a number of my friends think me very unwise to take her into my house. They argue that it is probable that Darnley will fall in love with her, but I can trust him not to make a *mésalliance*."

"I fail to see that it would be a *mésalliance*," said Hildegard, calmly. "Miss Marston is a lady, and Mr. Selwyn cannot be more than a gentleman."

"My dear!" with ill-suppressed irritation, "you do not understand; and Nora is not Darnley's style. He prefers fair women to dark. Here is home at last, and there is Nora on the lawn! You shall know each other soon."

The carriage went swiftly up the drive, and hearing the sound of wheels Miss Marston hurried to the house to welcome the newcomer.

She was a girl of medium height, very pretty and refined looking; but there was so wistful an expression in her large, dark eyes, that Hildegard's heart warmed towards her, and, instead of a formal bow, she grasped the companion's hand warmly, saying,—

"We shall be good friends, I hope!" and Nora made some half-incoherent reply.

She was startled and amazed by the girl's wonderful beauty—her queenly, gracious presence.

She had expected only to meet a raw, unformed school-girl; and lo! here was a "perfect woman, nobly planned," before whose grand beauty her own prettiness was dimmed and obscured.

"Do not go to your own room yet!" said Mrs. Selwyn, graciously. "Nora will ring for tea. There is nothing so refreshing after a long journey, and none of us will dress for dinner to-day, for I suppose your wardrobe does not include any evening toilets."

"Oh, yes!" answered Hildegard, calmly, "I sometimes dined out with Miss Collett, and she was careful about my comfort in all things."

"Quite a model governess!" yawned Mrs. Selwyn. "I am afraid you will miss her greatly!"

"I already do that!" gravely, and a regretful look stole into the grand, calm eyes.

"I do not doubt that," significantly, "but I hope you will find life here equally pleasant. And in the course of three weeks we are going to London. It is necessary you should be presented, and you will enjoy your first season."

"I think I shall. The very novelty will be agreeable."

"And what are we to call you? Hildegard, although a fine old Saxon name, sounds somewhat too formal for daily use. What did they call you at school?"

"Never anything but Hildegard, unless it was 'the princess'!" smiling.

"A very happy *non de plume*, my love! And now, Nora, show Miss Hope her rooms. Dinner will be served in half-an-hour."

The two girls went upstairs together, both silent until they reached the apartments dedicated to Hildegard.

"I hope you will like them!" Nora said, half-timidly, half-coldly.

"They are very pretty, and I am not hard to please!" and then, as she noticed the other's nervous, anxious manner, she added



kindly, "do not stay. You are wishful to make your own toilet, and I am quite used to helping myself."

Thanking her the companion hurried from the room, downstairs, and out into the garden, where a young man was walking to and fro smoking a huge meerschaum.

Nora's face was flushed, her eyes were a frightened, hunted look, and her breath came in great gasps.

"Darnley!" she managed to say, under her breath, and turning, he caught her hand in his.

"Nora, my pretty Nora!"

"Don't stay me, Darnley! I saw you, and felt I must speak to you. Miss Hope has arrived, and she is so lovely that—that knowing your mother's wishes, I am afraid!"

"You should not be. You know how fondly I love you!"

"Ah! but I am poor; and do you suppose I am blind to Mrs. Selwyn's position? Darnley, sometimes I think I shall go mad. You must see me to-night!"

"Well, then, we meet at nine, in the shrubbery!"

CHAPTER II.

"Now, Nora, darling, what's in the wind?" asked Darnley, as the girl joined him.

With a piteous gesture she put out her arms to him.

"Comfort me! comfort me!" she said, sobbingly. "I grow so weak; I am so afraid that I shall lose you at the last. Miss Hope is so beautiful, and your mother would like you to marry her. She is rich, your needs are great, and in the end I am afraid it will be as your mother wishes!"

"Never, Nora! The princess, and Jove! the name suits her, is not a girl 'after my own heart.' She's too confoundedly cold, and then she has such an objectionable way of looking over one's head, as though one were not good enough to touch the hem of her dress. There is no girl on earth could ever fill your place, dear heart!"

"I know you love me now," Nora answered, faintly; "but I am sorely troubled lest Miss Hope shall steal you away; or if not that, I fear Mrs. Selwyn may discover our secret and send me away, coercing you into a marriage with her ward. Oh! Darnley, bear with me a little longer. I love you so, and this deceit we practise daily makes me most unhappy. If Julian were to learn the truth he would disown me!"

"That would not signify much," said the young fellow. "You receive no benefits from him; and until such time as I can openly acknowledge you he must know nothing. Cheer up, Nora; there are good times coming!"

"I wish I could think so; but my heart is like lead in my breast. Tell me again you love me, and will be true. Even if tomorrow you forswear yourself, Darnley, I wish for your sake we had never met—sweetheart—sweetheart!" and she began to sob hysterically.

"Hush, hush!" he pleaded. "You do not guess how your tears and your doubts hurt me, I will never fail you, or love you less."

"Oh! Heaven bless you for those words! Heaven bless you, dear; they comfort and make me strong again. Now let me go, or your mother will wonder and suspect. Good-bye, dear heart, good-bye!"

A kiss, a hand clasp, and they parted; Nora flying with fear and trembling towards the house, Darnley strolling through the grounds in anything but a pleasant frame of mind.

No one knew so well as he how pressing were his personal debts; no one so well

guessed how deeply involved his mother's affairs were.

It was necessary he should marry an heiress, and quickly, if he would save the family name. And, oh! the pity of it! he loved Nora—penniless Nora Marston, who had nothing for her jointure but her good name and her pretty face.

"I can't do it," he said again and again. "Life would not be worth living without Nora. I won't give her up, and I won't marry 'the princess.'"

Having made this resolve he returned to the house and joined the ladies, Mrs. Selwyn making room for him between herself and her ward.

Hildegard looked at him calmly and meditatively. He was a handsome young fellow, tall and stalwart, but he did not cause her heart to throb one whit faster, or her pulses to beat more passionately, as he turned his smiling debonaire face upon her.

"You have borne the fatigue of your journey excellently well!" he said. "Your roses have not faded ever so little!"

"I am very strong," gravely. Then, with a glance at Nora, sitting all alone at the remote end of the room, "Dear Miss Marston, how far away you look! Come and sit beside me."

Nora lifted startled eyes to her employer, who, unwilling to offend her wealthy ward, signalled her consent; and with great dexterity Hildegard contrived to place the girl beside her lover.

The evening wore away in apparent harmony, but as Mrs. Selwyn wished her ward good-night she took the opportunity to say—

"My dear, I have but one fault to find with you. You are too kind towards dependents, who are always ready to take advantage of any favour. You must remember that Nora Marston is not your equal, and try to treat her accordingly!"

Oh! the scorn in those grand eyes! the utter disdain on the pure and perfect face!

"You ask me to do an impossible thing. So long as I remain here I shall treat Miss Marston as I should wish to be treated myself were I in a like position," and she swept from the room with an air which well might win her the name of "princess."

"She will be hard to manage," thought Mrs. Selwyn, as she went upstairs, "but I must not be discouraged. She is only a girl, with no knowledge of finesse or intrigue. But I am not satisfied with Darnley! It ought to be an easy thing to play at passion with such a beautiful creature!"

The next morning Hildegard walked with Nora through the quaint and pretty village. The companion was pale and thoughtful, so much so that presently Hildegard said,—

"I am afraid you are not well, Miss Marston! Would you prefer returning to the house?"

"Oh, no, thanks; and I am quite well! I was only thinking of Julian, my brother, you know. He is invalided home. He got a nasty wound in a skirmish with the Boers, and so in a day or two I expect he will reach England."

"That will be nice for you!"

"Yes! He has asked me to secure a cottage for him here; he objects to lodgings! Will you go with me to inspect it?"

"I should like it; but who is going to minister to his wants?"

"An old woman who used to be our nurse when we were little! Julian has always grieved so bitterly that he can make no provision for her. She is frantic with delight at the idea of his return!"

It struck the listener that Nora was far from frantic; and she wondered a little over this, but merely said,—

"Are you like Captain Marston?"

"I—oh, no! He is built on a very large scale, and has a splendid presence. But he is not handsome, only honest and almost stern-looking! You will soon have a chance of meeting him, although I do not suppose there will be much in common between an heiress and a poor soldier!"

"You should not speak so bitterly. I sometimes wish I was poor!"

"Don't!" interrupted Nora quickly. "You would know no happiness here if you were! Money is Mrs. Selwyn's god."

"And Darnley?"

"Oh!" flushing hotly; "he is as unlike his mother as it is possible to be. He is kind and generous to a fault! Do you like him?"

"I cannot tell. I am very slow to attach myself to any creature; but I think—I feel sure—that I shall care for you very much if you will let me! Miss Marston, will you be my friend?"

"I cannot promise!" was the unexpected reply. "Circumstances may arise which would render friendship between us impossible!"

Hildegard threw back her head proudly, and her fair face flushed with pain and vexation.

"I am sorry I asked you," she said coldly, and spoke no more until they reached the cottage. By that time she had recovered her usual sweet serenity. An old woman admitted them, and escorted them through the four rooms which were neatly and comfortably furnished. It was a pretty little place, and already the garden was bright with spring flowers.

"One could be very happy here!" said Hildegard, enthusiastically.

"Yes," assented Nora as she thought of Darnley, "although you know Keats says,—

"Love in a cottage, with water and a crust,
Is—love forgive us!—cinders, ashes, dust!"

"That's a man's idea!" said Hildegard, coolly, "and so isn't worth much!"

Nora laughed.

"You have a calm way of disposing of ideas you dislike! See! Miss Hope, I think Julian must have his desk here at this window, there is such a pretty view from it; and this old-fashioned and rather shabby chair can be made smart again with some ribbon and an antimacassar. With a few draperies the house will be complete!"

"Let me assist you in the arrangements. It will be something to do!"

"Very well! We can go into the village and get all we want; and if Mrs. Selwyn pleases we will come again this afternoon. I think you may expect us, Dorcas."

"Very well, Miss Nora! Oh! how glad I'll be of a sight of my boy!" and she began to bustle about, whilst the girls went out into the soft spring day. Hildegard was all eagerness to begin the work of adornment; and as Mrs. Selwyn was pleased to give permission, the girls, accompanied by Darnley, returned quickly to the cottage which was known as "Swallow's Nest."

It was then that Hildegard began to suspect Nora's secret, and wonder what hope she had of a happy ending to her love. She was all too well aware of Mrs. Selwyn's pride and ambition to believe she would ever welcome the poor girl as her daughter.

A great compassion filled her heart; and once, when Darnley was busy in the adjoining room, she rose, and laying her white, supple hands upon Nora's shoulders, said, gravely and sweetly,—

"Dear, when you refused my friendship this morning I was hurt and angry, I am so no longer, because I have guessed your reason. You were afraid I might try to rival you in Darnley's love. There is no need for fear!"

Trembling and half-terful, Nora took one strong, kind hand and kissed it.

"It is true, Miss Hope, that he loves me; but as yet he cannot openly confess it. You will keep our secret, and not think too poorly of me for my deceit?"

"I will love you, and help you if I can."

Then, Darnley returning, there was no further chance for speech; but from that hour Hildegard was careful to avoid the young man, and Mrs. Selwyn, watching, grew furious.

Creditors on all sides were clamouring for payment, and it was absolutely necessary that Darnley should marry well and quickly.

"Why are you so prejudiced against Darnley?" she ventured to ask her ward.

A faint flush stained the clearness of the young face.

"I do not understand you, Mrs. Selwyn. We are very good friends, I believe."

"Then why do you avoid him so markedly?"

"You forget, madam, I am as yet unused to male society!"

"That defect in your education will soon be remedied," with a slight affected laugh;

"and I think if you knew how much Darnley is pained by your manner you would show him some pity. My dear, there is no woman on earth he thinks so highly of as yourself!"

The grand, grey eyes were turned a moment on the lady incredulously, scornfully; a smile curved the perfect mouth.

"What a very curious way he has of showing his appreciation!"

Controlling herself by a supreme effort, Mrs. Selwyn said,—

"He is too proud to force himself upon you; and when a young man is really in earnest he is often at a disadvantage."

"Let me understand you thoroughly, Mrs. Selwyn. You mean that, although Darnley has known me so short a time, he loves me!"

What a horrible way she had of speaking plainly, thought the listener.

"That is precisely what I do mean. Hildegard—my poor boy!"

"Madam, if the feeling he has for me is love, I can only say it is very unlike what I have heard and read of the passion. And—let me be frank with you—I do not and never could care for him in the way you wish. He is pleasant and good to look upon, but a woman needs more than good temper and beauty in her husband."

Mrs. Selwyn was furious, and this time could not hide her rage and mortification.

"I think your wealth has turned your brain," she said, coarsely. "And you expect to wear a coronet in the near future. Pray understand that in marrying you, my son would be conferring an honour upon you. He is of irreproachable birth; whilst you, girl, are but the child of a merchant and a lady's-maid."

Very pale and erect the girl stood, and her eyes were shining like stars. Her voice was low and clear as she spoke.

"All honour to my mother that, being left an orphan, she chose to work rather than live on charity, to eat the bitter bread of dependence," and without another word she went out, conscious that victory was on her side.

From that day she held herself apart from her guardian, treating her with cold courtesy, and although Mrs. Selwyn did her best to win her confidence, and forgetfulness of her own insolent words, she failed.

At her wit's end, every resource exhausted, what could she do?

She began to hate the proud girl, whose innocence and candour overthrew all her stratagems, and wished she were well rid of her.

CHAPTER III.

CAPTAIN MARSTON had arrived, and Mrs. Selwyn, having given Nora permission to spend the afternoon and evening at Swallow's Nest (Darnley being ostensibly at a friend's), the two ladies sat alone. Mrs. Selwyn was reading, Hildegard toying with a piece of intricate embroidery, and looking unutterably weary of all things.

"What time do you expect Nora?" she asked, after a long silence.

"Not later than eight, certainly. Why do you ask, dear?"

"I am so tired of the house; and as it is so very near the time for her return I think I will go down to meet her."

"But, my dear, it is getting quite dark already!" in a shocked tone.

"Not dark; just dimly, deliciously dusk; and I know every step of the way. Please say I may go, and I promise if I meet Darnley to put myself under his protection. He said he should not stay late at the Fever-shams."

"A wilful woman will have her way, and you know I can refuse you nothing. But do not be long away, and pray take a warm wrap."

Thanking her for her permission, Hildegard dressed hurriedly, and a moment later Mrs. Selwyn saw her hurrying across the lawn.

"I wish I could break your spirit!" she said through her clenched teeth. "I wish I could bring you to my feet, you insolent, headstrong girl! How you should suffer and humbly beg for mercy!"

Unconscious of these extremely friendly wishes, Princess Hildegard went swiftly and lightly on her way, singing softly to herself; and, coming to Swallow's Nest, opened the gate, and went up the trim gravel path.

Dorcas opened the door, and saying, "Come in, miss," led her into the parlour, where no one was sitting but a tall, bronzed, soldierly-looking man.

"Is it you, Nora?" he said, closing his book. Then, glancing up, and seeing a strange and beautiful girl, he sprang to his feet.

"I beg your pardon!" he said, quickly. "I expected to see my sister."

"I was tired of my own society," answered Hildegard, frankly (by the way, that same frankness was her greatest charm), "and came to meet Nora. Is she not here?"

"She left an hour ago, promising to return shortly. I think she had some commission to execute for Mrs. Selwyn. Will you wait for her?"

"If I may, please," she answered, being only too well aware that Nora had no commission from her guardian, and fearing to return alone for the girl's sake. "I will not be any trouble, if you will only give me a book."

"I can assure you your visit is quite a pleasant interruption. I suppose, when a man has been accustomed to an active life, he gets hipped when illness or accident forces indolence upon him."

"I wish that I had something to do. Life is a very flat and unprofitable thing at Cecilia House."

"I can easily believe that. But will you not tell me your name? It is such a one-sided introduction; for, of course, you know who I am?"

"Oh, yes. You are Captain Marston, and I am Hildegard Hope."

"Mrs. Selwyn's ward. Nora has told me of you. By the way, Miss Hope, do you think she is happy? I thought her looking very ill."

"It is an uncongenial life," the girl answered, blushing furiously; "and Nora is very sensitive."

"Poor child, yes!" and the keen blue eyes softened, the rugged, honest face grew tender. "I wish I could provide her with a happy home; but I am so wretchedly poor! It was a mistake to put me in the army; and yet I don't know what else I am fit for!"

"Nora may marry, and be happy," Hildegard said, timidly. There was something in this man's manner, and the intent regard of his keen eyes, that overcame her with unwonted shyness. "Your sister is very pretty!"

"Yes; and a dear little soul, too! I wish I could see her some good man's wife!"

As he spoke, the door opened quickly, and Nora herself entered.

She started confusedly when she saw the "Princess," but the latter rose to the occasion.

"Dear," she said, "I was tired of myself, and came to meet you. You should not have made such great haste," as Nora sat down, panting for breath. "I will wait until you are rested."

"Oh, I am not tired, but I was so afraid of being late that I ran the whole way here. I think, Hildegard, we had best start now. Good-night, Julian, and I hope you will find everything very comfortable."

"I am going with you. It is quite dark now."

"Do not trouble," said Hildegard, smiling. "I am sufficient protection for Nora, and night air is not good for invalids."

"I am not half such an invalid as you suppose," laughing, "and I think an evening stroll is as good as a tonic," so the trio passed out together.

Nora was very quiet throughout the walk, but Julian and Hildegard talked eagerly and earnestly of literature and the arts, of the recent war, and the latest inventions; and it was with some reluctance that they parted at the gates.

Mrs. Selwyn looked up as they entered, saying in a displeased tone,—

"You must not keep Hildegard out such an unconscionable time again, Nora!"

Darnley, with a most innocent air assured them he had had a tedious day, and winced a little under Miss Hope's contemptuous look. Throwing aside hat and wrap, she said carelessly,—

"We were well protected, Mrs. Selwyn, Captain Marston escorted us home, and the evening is simply divine!"

The lady's face grew pale with anger, but she was wise enough to say only,—

"I am glad you were not alone," and Hildegard did not guess that, later on, Nora suffered because of her admission.

Mrs. Selwyn visited the companion's room just before retiring for the night.

"Nora," she said, harshly, "I am very much displeased with you!"

The poor girl turned her pale, scared face upon her employer.

"I am unfortunate to offend you so often of late. What have I done?"

"You have permitted Miss Hope to become acquainted with Captain Marston, and she is just the sort of girl to exalt such a man into a hero. Remember, in future, that I forbid any intercourse between them, and that disregard of my wishes will bring about your instant dismissal. Miss Hope is my son's prospective wife, and she is too rich a prize to be captured by a poor captain!"

And when she was gone the poor girl fell on her knees, and, with shuddering breaths, prayed Heaven that her lover might not be taken from her.

She rose in the morning unrefreshed and heavy-hearted, and went to Hildegard's room. The girl was sitting before a pier-glass, combing out her long, luxuriant hair; but she turned as Nora entered.

"How ill you look!" she said, pushing an easy chair towards her. "Darnley ought to be ashamed to subject you to such anxiety."

"I am not worrying because of him—at least, not much; but Mrs. Selwyn came to me last night and threatened me with dismissal if I permitted you to meet my brother!"

The hot blood flooded the girl's face and throat, and she reared her golden head high.

"Mrs. Selwyn presumes too far," she said, quickly. "I choose my own acquaintances, and you, Nora, shall not suffer because of me. But Darnley is wicked to leave you so much to his mother's mercy."

"Do not blame him; you do not yet understand how hard this lot is. And, Hildegard, if you love me—and I believe you do—never let Julian guess the truth. He would insist upon our engagement being publicly proclaimed, and so would ruin everything."

"I honour him for his honesty," said the Princess, and then, the breakfast bell ringing, the conversation closed.

That very afternoon Mrs. Selwyn and Nora drove into the neighbouring town, and as he sauntered moodily through the grounds Darnley came upon Hildegard.

She was standing with flower-filled hands, looking out over the lovely land, and she started a little when his voice broke the stillness.

"I was lost in the beauty of the scene!" she said, dreamily.

"And I was lost in the contemplation of your beauty," he began; but a look from the Princess stopped his words.

"You know how much I hate such foolish flattery!"

"I am not flattering. I—I—upon my word, Hildegard, you are a queen among women, and I—I—"

"Stop!" she said, in a low, stern voice. "No man has ever yet insulted me; do not you presume to do so, I know all that you would say. I know my wealth is, to you, my only attraction; and I say to you, that a moment's treachery to the woman who so loves, so idolises you, is a life-long blot upon your name. Remember Nora! Oh, how could you speak to me in lover's fashion?"

He was abashed before her.

"Forgive me," he pleaded. "I am a weak fool. I love Nora better than my life, but my mother urged upon me that our necessities are great, and you were to be had for the asking!"

"Your mother is pleased to flatter me," scornfully, "and you have disappointed me; but rest assured no word of this shall ever come to Nora's knowledge. As for Mrs. Selwyn, you may tell her I rejected you promptly and uncivilly."

In his relief he almost laughed.

"You are unique, Hildegard, but it would be well if more girls were like you. We can still be friends."

"Yes, if you behave well to Nora. Now you may take my flowers to the house. I am going for a ramble, and I won't make Nora jealous by deeming to affect your society;" and with those words she left him.

Out on the high road she met Captain Marston. Now that the flush of excitement had left his face he looked very worn and ill; but he smiled brightly when he saw Hildegard, and advanced with outstretched hand.

"All alone, Miss Hope? Where are your natural guardians?"

"Thank you, I am quite capable of caring for myself; but Nora has gone to Pattensbridge with Mrs. Selwyn, and the beauty of the day tempted me to play truant."

"Have you been to Piper's wood yet?"

"No, but Nora tells me it is a lovely spot—a perfect Paradise."

"So it is! Will you go now? May I take you there?"

With no trace of coquetry or shyness she answered yes; and they walked on side by side until they entered the deep shadows of the fragrant woods.

"I should like to rest," said the girl. "I am a little tired!"

So they sat down on a grassy knoll, the soldier looking up into the exquisite face above, and yet neither dreamed of love, although, indeed, love was with them even in that hour.

They spoke of many things—of great and holy lives, of heroism, and self-sacrifice, and soul communion with soul.

They forgot the passing hours. The soldier no longer remembered his poverty, or the girl the shortness of their acquaintance, being lapped in a happy dream.

No thought of Mrs. Selwyn's displeasure troubled Hildegard's peace for her nature was utterly fearless; and when, rising, Julian said it was late, and begged to walk home with her, she readily accorded permission. They parted at the gates, and as she entered the hall Mrs. Selwyn came out to her.

"Who was your companion?" she asked, with ominous calmness.

"Captain Marston!"

"Was your meeting accidental?"

"I would not stoop to make a clandestine appointment."

"I am glad to hear that, but it is my duty to warn you against adventurers—to prevent you throwing yourself away upon a needy fortune-hunter!"

"Captain Marston is not the only man in our circle open to such an accusation!" the girl said, pointedly, "and poverty is not a crime. Please say no more on the subject."

"It is my duty, and I should be culpable to neglect it. You ought to know how much I have your interest at heart—how much I wish to see you happily settled. Your wealth makes me anxious for you, and I tell you frankly, I shall not admit Captain Marston to the house so long as you remain free!"

"As you will, madam," proudly.

"And, Hildegard, to-morrow you may begin your preparation for our visit to town. We start on Monday."

There was no change in the girl's face, which relieved Mrs. Selwyn's anxiety in a measure. She only said,—

"I shall be ready;" but as she went upstairs she could not repress a smile, for just before starting Julian had told her important business would call him to town during the following week.

"I shall see him soon," she said to her happy heart; and then a deep blush mantled face and throat, and she asked herself, "Is it wrong to think so much of him? Is it maidenly?"

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIEND of Mrs. Selwyn's, unable through ill-health to remain in town, had kindly placed her *bijon* house at that lady's disposal; so on Monday the family moved thither.

Then began such a round of pleasures for Hildegard that she was sometimes bewildered—sometimes a little weary, despite her keen enjoyment in everything she heard and saw.

Only one thing displeased her, and that was the pronounced difference in Mrs. Selwyn's manner towards herself and Nora.

More than once she had begged the girl might share her pleasures, accompany them to this or that place; but Mrs. Selwyn was firm in her refusal.

Everywhere the lady and her ward appeared men delighted to do homage to the girl; but she was proof against their flatteries—ice to their fire.

They called her by many names, pretty and fantastic, but the old *nom de plume* clung to her, and seemed her most fitting title, so "Princess Hildegard" she remained.

One night they attended a ball, given by the motherly Lady Gardiner, and there, to her joy, Hildegard met Julian once again. The hot flush mantling her exquisite face, the glad light in the grand eyes, told him all the thought she hid so well.

She loved him! His heart throbbled fiercely a moment, and then seemed to stand still, and he grew pale even through his tan.

What joy could it be to know she loved him, when he dared not ask her hand, when between her and him there lay the glittering treasure of her wealth?

That thought made his greeting almost cold, but too true herself to nurse a doubt of him, she, leaning forward, said gently,—

"You are not well, or something troubles you? Will you not honour me with your confidence, Captain Marston?"

He was only mortal, and as he looked into those tender eyes, that beautiful, earnest face, courage and resolution alike failed him. Just for a little while he would be glad in her presence and her love, if all his after-life were darker for this glimpse of joy.

"I am neither ill nor troubled," he said, lightly, "only I was getting a trifle bored. I am so no longer. Have you any dances left?"

"Oh, yes. I saved some because I had a sort of presentiment I should meet you here, and I do not forget old friends for new!"

Taking the dainty tablets from her he scribbled his initials down for two waltzes, saying, as he did so,—

"Mrs. Selwyn won't like this!"

He almost laughed out at the expression of disdain which crossed the girl's face—the haughty way in which she drew back her head; and seeing his amusement, she, too, laughed.

"Did I look very terrific?" she said, placing her hand on his arm. "You have yet to learn what a termagant I can be. This is our waltz!"

Then he had her in his arms, and they had joined the whirling throng. Her face was flushed, her eyes starbright; how happy she was! Surely her bliss could know no end—her love no cloud!

"Stop!" she said, at last. "I would like to rest!" and he, nothing loth, led her to a seat well hidden from view by ferns and palms.

"How deliciously cool it is here! and how I wish Nora could be with us! Poor little Nora!"

Julian sighed.

"It is hard for her; poor child; and if she would only consent to go abroad with me I am sure she would be happier than in her present position. I wish you would use your influence with her!"

"I am afraid that in this matter I have none. She is so attached to—Lesley, and perhaps, she has the usual feminine horror of travelling."

But Julian did not look satisfied.

"Will you tell me if I am right in supposing young Selwyn has a more than common interest in her. Sometimes I have thought there was a great deal too much *empressment* in his manner towards her for mere friendship?"

"You must not ask me that. Why not question Nora or Darnley?"

He frowned a little, then saying,—

"You are quite right, and I will endeavour to act on your advice," turned to other and indifferent topics.

Once Darnley passed them with a plain, delicate looking girl on his arm. She was looking up into his face with beaming eyes, and her pale cheeks were most unwontedly flushed.

"If there is anything between Selwyn and Nora I am sorry!" said Julian, "most sorry for poor little Phoebe Gardiner. It is easy to see she is devotedly attached to him, and a disappointment of that kind would be her death-blow."

"I have often felt sorry for Lady Gardiner," the girl answered. "Her whole life seems bound up in her daughter. I am afraid to think what it would mean for her if Phoebe died!"

"The girl is a great heiress!" reflectively, "and Selwyn is poor. It would be a splendid match for him!"

But Hildegard thought of Nora—Nora sitting lonely and sad, and held her peace; only her heart grew sore for her, remembering Darnley's necessities and his weakness.

To her surprise, Mrs. Selwyn did not comment on her conduct towards Julian, but was extremely affable during the homeward drive; and she guessed what was in her mind when she remarked on Phoebe Gardiner's amiability and affectionate disposition, and grew more than ever afraid for Nora.

They met often after that, and folks began to link Julian's name with the princess's; but Mrs. Selwyn showed no anger now. If the girl chose to marry a pauper that was no concern of hers, so long as Darnley was well provided for, and little Phoebe Gardiner was only waiting for him to speak.

He was not at all the man her ladyship would have chosen as a husband for her child; but never in her life had she refused her any wish—she was so delicate, and pain or disappointment would kill her.

As for Julian, he drifted with the stream until some words accidentally overheard at the club roused him to a sense of his folly, as he was pleased to call it.

"So Marston is making the running with the princess?" said one man.

"So they say; and a deuced good thing it will be for him if the fair Saxon favours his suit. He's as poor as Job when he lost all his flocks and herds, and she's no end of an heiress!"

"She is lovely enough to send a man mad for her; but I reckon it's her money that makes her so charming to Marston!"

In a white fury Julian strode forward, much to the gossips' confusion.

"I don't know on what authority you speak," he said, in a low, concentrated voice, "but you are utterly out of your reckoning. There is nothing between Miss Hope and myself beyond friendship. I would thank you to contradict any report you may hear to the contrary." And with that he took his leave.

So this was what his love had brought him! The scorn of the high-minded, the envy of the mean, he, Julian Marston, was condemned as the most despicable of creatures—a fortune-hunter. He writhed under the knowledge; and pride, his besetting sin, urged him to go away in silence.

He could not be blind to the fact that Hildegard was not indifferent to him; but she was so young, and perhaps, for her own sake, he hoped to kill her love by rough discourtesy. Yet how to go away without farewell! He had been more than mortal to do it!

That very night he met her at the house of a mutual friend. She was looking exquisitely beautiful in shimmering robes of white

silk and frosted tulle; her fair, proud face slightly flushed, her eyes aglow with love and happiness. Oh! to think she might be his—his very own! and then to be compelled by honour to put her away. The man's strong heart died within him.

And now her hand was in his; her eyes sought his. He set his teeth hard, and fought for composure. Then he said in a strange, husky voice—

"I want to speak to you alone. Will you come on to the balcony?"

Without a thought of grief, or a doubt of the future, she smilingly went with him; but she had to wait very long before he spoke—so long that she touched his arm, saying—

"What have you to tell me?"

He started, and the face he turned upon her was ghostly in its pallor.

"Nothing of importance; only that tomorrow I return to Lesley, and in two months I start for India!"

"India!" in a low voice. "Do you go alone?"

"Yes! You don't suppose a *vaurien* like me has many belongings?"

"Do not speak like that. Will not Nora go with you?" tremulously.

"No; her heart is in England. Hildegard, this is our good-bye!"

So white and rigid she stood, with the cold moonbeams falling all around and about her, such agony in her eyes, that all his soul cried out to him to have mercy upon her.

"Do you mean that when we part now, it will be for ever?"

"I hope so. I trust I shall have left Lesley behind before your return!"

"You hate me so much?" in a low strange voice.

"A thousand times no! I love you more than life itself!"

"Then stay with me, or take me with you!" she said, under her breath, whilst all her lovely face and throat glowed ruddily under his gaze.

"Now, Heaven help me! And you, as you love me, do not tempt me! Think a moment what the people we know would say did I ask you in marriage! They would believe it was your wealth, and not yourself, I loved and wooed!"

"What matter?" proudly. "You and I would know the truth!"

"Ah; but, Hildegard, there might come a day when you, too, would doubt me!"

"Never!" fervently. "Do not I know you as you are? Do not I love you? And perfect love casts out fear and doubt alike!"

"This is too hard! You should help me to do my duty! Sweetheart, I am a poor, plain man, with nothing to recommend me but my love; and even that might well be open to doubt. You are young, rich, beautiful! and in time will forget you ever dreamed you cared for me! I dare not wrong you so far as to claim you mine!"

"You wrong me now!" proudly, and yet with deep tenderness. "I shall love you all my life! Try me, test me as you may, I shall never fail you! Why should you let my money come between us, to break your heart and mine? Julian, you cannot be so cruel!"

"Hush! hush! Heart's, darling, it is for the best! I can do no other!" and, man-like, he believed he was acting nobly, unselfishly; did not realise how poor was his pride compared with hers.

She would plead no longer; but, with a great and tender dignity, she turned to him—

"Julian, it is not my province to woo. That I love you, you know! and I leave that thought to abide with you! Perhaps, when you are far from me, you will understand

how cruel you were to me in this hour. Love—that is strong as death has no room for pride or doubt, and until then I will wait with what patience I may until you bid me join you, but never believe I can forget you!"

With a passionate gesture he caught her hands.

"Do not make me turn a deaf ear to my conscience! Do not teach me to dishonour my name, my only possession! It is best we should part!"

"Ah! you should have thought of these things before you taught me to love you!" And that was her first and last reproach.

In an agony of pain, crueler, he thought, than the pangs of death, he caught her to his breast, and kissed her madly.

"My dear! my dear! forgive me!"

With her arms about his neck, her cheek pressed close to his, she whispered,—

"I do forgive! and I shall live in hope that all clouds will clear away from our sky! And now, my darling, say good-bye, and let me go!"

Good-bye! Ah, the passion and pain in that one little word! The misery and heart-break conveyed in it!

Strong man as he was, Julian faltered over it, and could find no other word to say. But she, eager in her love to comfort him, to let some pleasant word remain with him through the weary days that should follow, drew down his head upon her breast, and said quite steadily,—

"Heaven be with you in all your doings! guard you! bless you! keep you! and bring you back again to me! Dear love! good-bye!"

A little later he was hurrying towards his hotel, and Hildegard stood alone on the balcony.

There a young Oxonian found her.

"Miss Hope! and alone! Aren't you afraid of taking cold?"

She turned with a faint, sweet smile which made him blind to the whiteness of her face, the gloom in her eyes.

"I scarcely ever take cold, Mr. Spearman; and the night is too lovely to waste indoors. I came here to be quiet."

"May I stay with you?" eagerly.

"I think not. I have already left Mrs. Selwyn too long alone."

Together they returned to the drawing-room, and not one who looked on the pure, proud face guessed how cruel a cross she was bearing.

Julian was gone, and she was left desolate; but to no one would she confess her pain or her love.

In silence she would suffer, so gaining new strength with each new day; and for comfort she would resolutely hope and believe that in the end Julian's pride would prove weaker than his love!

CHAPTER V.

A MONTH went by with lightning speed, and it was clear to all that Phoebe Gardiner was only waiting for Darnley to speak. "It would be a great thing for him to marry the heiress," said Society, and wondered that he did not utter the final word. Of his love for Nora it was ignorant; of the dark secret of his life nothing was yet known.

A few close observers wondered and talked over the young man's changed appearance, his fitful spirits, and daily increasing moodiness. Could they but have read his heart, have heard the pleadings of his importunate conscience, and known how good and bad angels were striving with him, they would have stood aghast.

Mrs. Selwyn grew impatient with him.

"What a laggard in love you are!" she said, peevishly; "and you know very well

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I cannot hold our creditors at bay much longer. As it is, I must return to Lesley next week. I wish, before I go, to know that all is settled between you and Phoebe."

"You are in a hurry to make my misery sure!" he retorted, sullenly.

"How absurdly you talk! Where is the misery in marrying an amiable heiress?"

"I don't care two straws for the girl; and never shall!"

"In how many marriages does love figure largely?" she asked cynically. "It is a good thing if husband and wife tolerate each other. Now, Darnley, for my sake, do not let this chance slip. It may be your last. I verily believe you would have won Hildegard but for your lukewarm wooing!"

"She is not such a fool as to take up with a fellow of my stamp! Mother, whatever misery comes, whatever wrong I am guilty of, lies at your door! You should have given me a profession or a trade even. I should have been a better fellow then!"

"Oh! lay the blame of your sins and follies on my shoulders; that is a man's way! You were born a gentleman, and I educated you as was fitting your position!"

"My position! What is it? I wish to Heaven I had never been born," and with that he flung out of the room tempestuously, leaving his mother in tears.

But before she left town with her ward she had his assurance that he would speak to Phoebe. The heiress had been ailing for some time, and Lady Gardiner proposed taking her to Castley, a small seaside place on the south coast. Darnley was to accompany them, and it was a mystery to him how his mother contrived to provide the necessary funds. He would have been considerably surprised to learn that she had borrowed largely of Princess Hildegard, who was as generous as she was high-minded.

When Nora heard the decision she went to the girl, white and trembling.

"Tell me!" she gasped. "Is it true Darnley goes with the Gardiners to Castley?"

"My poor Nora! Yes!"

"Tell me what it means! My brain is in a whirl, and my heart is like lead in my bosom. You will not deceive me. Is he going to marry Miss Gardiner?"

"Oh, my poor girl! My poor girl! I am afraid he is!"

She threw out her arms with a passionate gesture, crying,—

"I won't believe it! I dare not, until he himself confesses it is true!" and with a low cry fell senseless to the floor.

In her tender thought for "Julian's sister" Hildegard would not summon assistance, but gently and carefully tended her herself; although, indeed she was frightened by the long, continued swoon. But at last the white lids lifted, the dark eyes, full of anguished dread, met her own a moment shrinkingly, and the faint voice said,—

"I have given you a great deal of trouble. You are very good to me; but, oh! what shall I do? What shall I do? As you value your happiness, as you long for peace and rest, never, never, give your life into a man's keeping! Love is a curse! Oh, Heaven! what I have suffered! If I dared show you all the truth!"

"Do not be afraid, Nora! I am waiting to hear and sympathise!"

"No, no! You would despise me if you knew all my weakness!" and she rose with a great effort. "Dear Miss Hope, when you know how wicked and foolish I have been, try to pity me still—and—forgive!"

"Darling Nora! You do not know what you say! You are ill, poor heart; but you

must not doubt my affection for you! You must not allow yourself to brood until you are morbid! And why do you call me Miss Hope?"

"There is a wide gulf between us!" Nora answered, twisting her fingers together convulsively. "I—I—oh, do not question me any more!" and she burst into a flood of bitter tears, whilst Hildegard vainly tried to console her.

The next day "the princess" sought Darnley in the smoking-room.

"I want to speak to you," she said, coming directly to the point. "Are you at liberty?"

"Always when it is the princess who commands."

She frowned a little. Flattery was so obnoxious to that pure and noble mind.

"A truce to civilities, Darnley. My business is important. Do you know that Nora is very ill and unhappy, all because of you?"

He turned from her a moment, then back again.

"I know I am a scoundrel," he said, in a low, intense tone, "and a coward to boot. Did she send you?"

"No; she is not aware of my errand. But I cannot stand patiently by and see her life slipping from her because of her unhappy love. Oh, Darnley! play the man now! and I promise to be your friend always. This poor girl loves you so dearly will serve you so faithfully; and I—I out of my plenty will help you if you will but let me. Surely you would not break Nora's heart or burden your soul with such a crime as faithlessness!"

With a passionate gesture he turned to her.

"Why are you not my sister? I might have been a better man with you to help me! Heaven pity me and forgive me—I—I—Hildegard—there seems no way of escape for me. It is true I love Nora; but we cannot live on love—and I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed!"

"You forget that I will help you, even to the half of my fortune."

"I know you would if it were possible, but your fortune is strictly tied up. You cannot touch a penny of it until you are of age, and even then you are not sole arbitress of it. Don't you know the conditions of your father's will?"

"No!" blankly. Then, with a happy thought, "Could not I raise some money?"

"It is not legal for a minor to do so, I fancy; and even if it were I could not accept such a gift from you!"

She laid one slender hand upon his arm.

"Darnley, Lask it for Nora's sake!"

His face was white as death, his eyes could not meet the intent regard of hers.

"Hildegard, give me time to think. I will try to play the man. In the meanwhile say nothing to Nora. Give me a week in which to decide; and this was the only concession Hildegard could obtain.

So the next week the girls returned with Mrs. Selwyn to Lesley; but Darnley went with the Gardiner party. Through the ready help of "the princess" the lovers had one long hour to themselves before the parting.

What Darnley said to Nora Hildegard did not know, but it must have been something consoling, for the girl looked less pale and ill than before, and even her voice had a brighter tone.

Julian was still at the cottage, but he was rarely to be seen. He felt his only safety lay in avoiding the girl he loved; and so in solitude he nursed his passion and his pride, believing he acted honourably in holding Hildegard at arm's length, not yet realising the depth and unselfishness of woman's love.

Seven days wore by, and yet no word from Darnley, and Nora drooped like a fading lily, Eight—nine—ten, and then a letter came to Mrs. Selwyn, which evidently gave her great pleasure.

She did not at once communicate the contents of it to Hildegard, but brooded delightedly over it until the five o'clock dinner ended.

The ladies always dined early when there was no company, and of this the "princess" was glad, liking the solitary loiterings in the beautiful gardens—the long, quiet hours, in which she gathered new strength, new hope for the morrow.

Now she sat with Mrs. Selwyn in the drawing-room pretending to read, but now and again glancing at Nora, who was seated at a little distance on the balcony, most intent upon some fine sewing.

"My dear!" said Mrs. Selwyn, in her most mellifluous tone, "I have some very good news for you; and as you are so high in Darnley's esteem I thought you should be the first to congratulate him and me!"

Every word the lady spoke was audible to the poor girl on the balcony, and Hildegard's heart stood still with fear for her. She rose hastily.

"Shall I close the windows first, madam? I think the air is growing chilly!"

"Why, child, it is quite sultry to-night! If you have no objection I should prefer them to remain as they are. Sit down. You are so tall it makes my neck ache looking up to you!"

What could she do but obey? Her heart was full of the pity it would be unwise to show for the pale girl she called friend.

"Tell me your good news?" she said, in a very low voice.

Mrs. Selwyn needed no second bidding.

"My dear, I have here a letter from Darnley (Nora stopped sewing, and listened with bated breath), and I must confess I never was so glad for him as now. We are not rich people, and I have often been troubled when thinking of his future. I need have no further anxiety. From this letter I gather he has been so fortunate as to win Phoebe Gardiner's affections, and their engagement will soon be publicly announced. He will be with us in a few days, when we shall learn all!"

What cry was that, so full of horror and despair? Mrs. Selwyn started nervously. From where she sat she could not see Nora, who had risen trembling in every limb, white as the roses clustering about the balcony.

"What was that, Hildegard? Did not you hear some one moaning?"

"No, no!" hurriedly, and all unconsciously lying to shield the poor companion, "But you have not told me all. I used to think Darnley did not reciprocate poor little Phoebe's attachment!"

"Perhaps he does not, but he has won her—that is all I care to know!"

Outside Nora stood, her hands pressed hard upon her heart, her face and form rigid as marble, a look of utter horror in her sweet eyes.

"How tardy you are with your congratulations!" said Mrs. Selwyn, peevishly.

"I cannot congratulate Mr. Selwyn or Phoebe on certain misery!"

"You have most peculiar and plebeian ideas. The arrangement is suitable in every way!" Mrs. Selwyn rejoined, tartly.

"Suitable! I fail to see it. Phoebe Gardiner gives love, wealth, a pure, unsullied youth in exchange for what? Oh! I am sorry—I am sorry for her!" and with those words she went out.

Was there ever such an intractable maiden as this?

Nora was still on the balcony. She turned her ghastly face on the "princess" as she

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heard her advancing step, and the look upon it held the other silent a moment. Then, touching her gently, she asked,—

"You have heard all?"

"Every word," in a voice so faint and hollow it scarcely reached the listening girl. "Oh! as you hope for happiness, as you cherish your honour, as you have loved and love me, tell me all the truth. Do you believe it?"

"Nora! Nora! what shall I say to you? I am afraid there is no doubt of Darnley's faithlessness. Oh! you poor child, do not faint—be brave a little longer! Lean on me—there, so—my dear, and try to listen to what I say. Darnley is coming home in a few days. Do not quite despair until you see him. It may be that Mrs. Selwyn has made this statement to suit her own purposes. You know, Nora, she is not to be trusted. And if it should chance that Darnley is lost to all honour, all manhood, you must try with might and main to forget him!"

"Forget!" said Nora, in a low and anguished tone. "Forget! I shall die first. Oh! you who are so much above me in all things good and desirable, how can you know anything of my anguish and shame?"

"Shame!" echoed Hildegard. "Nora, why do you talk so wildly?"

"Is it not shame to me that I have allowed myself to be deceived, entrapped into a clandestine engagement? That I—born a lady—have been the toy and amusement of his leisure hours? If Julian knew all, he would kill me! Oh, Heaven! help me, I think I am going mad!"

So strong she was herself, that a sort of gentle scorn touched Hildegard's pity for this poor unhappy girl.

Rather than confess her love for Julian she would have died; rather than show her anguish to another she would have smiled over it, met him with steady eyes and unblanched face. But Nora was different—and she was his sister.

"Confess all to Captain Marston! I am sure he will not be unmerciful," she urged. "He will think as I do, that all blame rests on Darnley."

"I dare not! I dare not! You don't know what you ask, and Julian never forgives deceit. He is too honourable himself."

"Then, if you will not do this thing, at least hope until Darnley comes, and, believe me, Nora, dear, in all and through all I am with you!"

"Heaven bless and keep you, and help me to keep your words in my heart. Now let me go. Oh, my beautiful darling! If you could guess all my anguish, all my despair, you would pity me, even whilst you condemn!"

"I do pity you, and I cannot condemn. Stay, Nora," but the unhappy girl twisted herself out of that tender embrace, and went hurriedly into the house.

CHAPTER VI.

DARNLEY was returning home. Mrs. Selwyn, in a state of jubilation, had ordered a most elaborate feast for the prodigal, and had interviewed several long-suffering tradesmen with all her old haughty intolerance. Hildegard, with her usual generosity, had presented Nora with a pretty evening dress of palest pink, and bade her look her best. The girl answered with a sob, and donned her new dress without any elation natural to such an occasion.

"It is of no use," she said, heartbrokenly.

"I cannot win him back again!"

"Foolish Nora! Why, you are far and away prettier than poor Phoebe!"

"And poorer!" Nora said, bitterly. And

even "the princess" was bound to confess, when she appeared that evening, that she was not looking her best.

"I must pinch a little colour into those poor, pale cheeks!" she said, smiling, but no answering smile met hers.

"I am growing ugly!" said Nora, "and Darnley loves all things bright and pretty! Oh, Hildegard! I am afraid—so awfully afraid of the future!"

Hildegard kissed her.

"Be brave a little longer dear! A few more hours, and you will know the best or the worst. And if it is the worst exercise your woman's pride, and cast your unhappy love out of your heart."

Nora clasped her temples with hot and trembling hands.

"My love is my life!" she said, "and my curse! Now may Heaven help me, for if he fails me I cannot bear my agony and live!"

No other word passed between them. Mrs. Selwyn now appearing on the scene she glanced with great disfavour on Nora's pretty dress, and said irately,—

"I am afraid you have extravagant tastes, Nora; and, really, I must say your labour to appear—ah! well looking!—is in vain! Upon my word, you are quite *parade*!"

The hot blood flooded the companion's face, but she was too wise to reply; only the gentle touch of Hildegard's hand, the kindness in her eyes, melted her almost to tears.

They went downstairs together, and in a little while they heard the sound of carriage wheels in the distance. Mrs. Selwyn ran out into the hall. Hildegard stood erect, whilst Nora, half-fainting, sank back into a chair. Quick as thought the young heiress was beside her.

"Courage, Nora! You must not let Mrs. Selwyn guess the truth now! For Darnley's sake and your own be brave!"

Her words had the desired effect. The poor girl sat up, and with a tremendous effort attained something like self-control, and seeing this, Hildegard ventured to leave her a few moments. As she entered the hall she saw Mrs. Selwyn greeting Darnley with rare effusion; she saw, too, how worn and ill he looked, and her heart misgave her. Advancing, she offered her hand—

"I am glad you have returned!" she said, graciously, and the young man flushed, knowing her hidden meaning. She leant on his arm, looking searchingly into his face; and, as Mrs. Selwyn preceded them, she asked in a whisper, "Darnley, is this rumour true? And if so, what of your manhood? What of Nora?"

He made her no answer, and her great and tender heart was full of compassion for the pale, heavy-eyed girl standing in the glow of the ruddy lamps, waiting to give him formal greeting, when all her soul was crying out for his love.

As his eyes fell upon Nora, so changed, so aged as scarcely to bear any resemblance to her former self, his own face grew rigid and white, and he caught his breath fiercely. But in a moment he recovered himself, and offering her hand, said—

"You are ill, Miss Marston?"

"Yes!" faintly. "I am—afraid—I am; but—I shall be better soon."

"Oh, Nora is always faint-hearted!" broke in Mrs. Selwyn. "She will rapidly develop into a valetudinarian. But how is Phoebe? Better I hope! And now run away and dress! The girls (with a glance at Nora) have made such extensive preparations for this event that you must not be behind!"

Darnley was singularly taciturn and submissive, for without a word he went up

to his own room, to return in a short while resplendent in evening dress. All through that miserable dinner Mrs. Selwyn spoke persistently of the Gardiners, and with Nora's anguished eyes upon him Darnley answered very much at random, and finally broke out savagely—

"Oh! confound the Gardiners! Talk of someone else!" and so glad in her sudden sense of pecuniary safety was Mrs. Selwyn that she uttered no reproach. Once in the drawing-room she fell soundly asleep, and Hildegard, stealing to Darnley, whispered—

"Go to the shrubbery! Nora is there, waiting an explanation; and if ever you loved her, if ever you meant one word of your many vows, be true to her in this hour of trial! She is very ill! Sometimes I think she will die!"

Without a word, without a look at the lovely, pleading face, he went out, and walked slowly towards the trysting-place, thinking he would rather have gone to the stake.

Long before he reached the spot he could see Nora's white-robed figure fitting to and fro like a restless ghost.

Under the cold moonlight her dress showed white, but it was not so white as the poor little face she lifted to him as he drew near.

"Nora!" he said, and held out his arms to her.

Like a child she ran to him; like a child laid her face against his breast, sobbing out—

"Darnley! Darnley! it is not true?"

His face whitened, the muscles about his mouth twitched, but he said with tolerable steadiness—

"Nora, darling! control yourself! For my sake, you must be brave!"

Ah, cruel, selfish plea! But there was none so well calculated to move her heart.

"I will try!" she said, under her breath; "but you must bear with me a little! I—I am so weak and ill! At times I have thought and hoped I was dying!"

"No, no!—Nora! Nora! Oh, Heaven! Ask some other to tell you the awful truth!"

"What do you mean?" she asked, in a breathless way. "I—I am frightened!"

He held her fast, and she felt his hot tears on her hair. They stung her face and brow.

"Darnley, what—what is it?" she gasped.

"This—all is ended for us! I—I am to marry Phoebe!"

She did not cry out or swoon; she only tried, with wild, futile strength, to free herself from him.

"What—is—to—become—of me?" she breathed.

"Nora, I am a scoundrel! but, on my soul, I will do my best for you! Oh, Heaven! this is worse than death!"

"Worse than death!" she echoed, in a low, intense tone. "Yes, for me! There is neither help nor pity for me now! Julian will know—and all our little world!"

"Curse me!" he cried, and fell on his knees. "Curse me, Nora!"

Her wan and wasted face was bent upon him in agonised despair.

"I cannot!" she said, with her hands pressed hard upon her heart. "I have loved, and love you too well! Darnley, I have no reproach for you even now, author of my anguish and shame! I love you still; and, as Heaven is my witness, I shall love you to the end! Kiss me for the last time!—the last time! And, remember, through all your life, that with my dying breath I bless you! with my last heart-throb I loved you! Be kinder to her than you have been to me! Oh, men! men! men! how little you deserve our love!"

"Nora! sweetheart! you do not doubt that you are all in all to me?"

"Not all in all, for wealth is more than love; but I will try to think you care enough for me to make an honest woman of me before the world, if, indeed, that were possible! Darnley, my only fault has been that I loved you too well; and now—and now—oh, Heaven! I reap my reward!"

"Hush! hush! your words are hard to bear! Nora, do you think I will leave you alone to face the future? So long as you live you shall not want; and in some place where you are not known I will find you a quiet home!"

"No! no! I will take nothing from you. You must forget, as I shall soon!"

"What do you mean? Forgive me! I have been a thorough scoundrel! What can I do to atone?"

"Nothing!" mournfully. "All is over for me now! I—I shall find my way out of this trouble. But, Darnley, be careful of Julian! He is an honourable man, and proud! When he knows all he will be sorely humbled and ashamed! Whatever he may say try to bear for his sake!"

"Why do you talk like this, as though you intend doing some desperate deed? Why do you speak as though this were our farewell?"

"It is! I cannot meet you any more; it would kill me! The burden of my shame and anguish is too great for me to bear! I do not blame you now, because these are the last words I will ever speak to you! But you should have spared me—so young, so friendless, so much alone! and, oh, Heaven, so trustful! With all my heart I pray you may be happy—that no thought of me may trouble your peace! But—but when people speak ill of me, I pray you will find courage to say, 'She loved much, and should be forgiven much.' Now kiss me, and let me go!"

"Oh, Heaven! How dare I lose you? Where will you go, my sweetheart, whose forgiveness I dare not ask?"

"I shall find a place of refuge. Do not fear for me—do not seek to find me. If you can—keep your unhappy secret inviolate—oh! I cannot bear to think how ill folks will speak of me when I am gone. Father—my father—thank Heaven, you will never know how soiled and stained your little daughter is;" and then she broke into the bitterest tears, sobbing in a low and dreadful way.

And he for whose sake she had forgotten name and honour, he who had made her a creature to be despised, stood helplessly by; not daring to offer comfort where no comfort could be.

But the paroxysm did not last long. Dashing away her tears she lifted her heavy eyes to his white, shame-stricken face.

"It is over now. I shall not cry again. Darnley, by all our love, by that restitution you owe me, I beg you to kiss me now and let me go. My strength fails me!"

In silence he kissed those unrepentant lips, in silence he loosed the young form; but when she had gone a little from him, he called after her.

"Nora! Tell me what you will do! Where you are going?"

"I am going to Julian. I shall not come back again. Good-bye!" and then she flitted, a desolate figure, through the trees and shrubs, and was soon lost to sight.

He lingered long in the grounds, fighting vainly for composure; wondering what the future held for that poor unhappy girl whose life he had laid waste. Then, unable to bear his own society longer, he returned to the house.

Hildegard looked up quickly as he entered, and read by his face that he had renounced love for wealth; and when he

ventured to address her, she turned on him with a haughty glance, and disdained to reply.

Slowly the evening wore by, and the doors were being barred, when a servant announced that "Miss Marston was still out!"

"Out!" cried Mrs. Selwyn, in high dudgeon. "Fasten all the doors!" Then to Hildegard, "You see, she quite scorns the proprieties, and is no fit companion for you. To-morrow she will receive her discharge!"

"No, mother, no!" cried Darnley. "It is all my fault; I forgot to tell you. I met Nora going to Swallow's Nest. She seemed ill, and asked permission to remain at her brother's until the morning. Of course I granted it."

"Since when have I ceased to be mistress in my own house, or over my own servants? Miss Marston has forfeited her situation by the great lack of respect she has shown," and she swept from the room to signify the subject was ended.

But Hildegard stayed behind a moment.

"You have broken the news to Nora—it will kill her! I hope you are satisfied with your work!"

Then she, too, left him alone with his thoughts, a prey to the keenest remorse and pain; weakly pitying himself for his inability to marry the woman he loved.

In the meanwhile Nora made her way to "Swallow's Nest." She had that to do which must be done quickly; but she could not steel herself to leaving Julian without one good-bye.

A rush of thoughts overwhelmed her, a newborn tenderness for this kind and honourable brother filled her heart.

"Oh!" she said, "I have never loved or prized him as I should, and now it is too late. My poor Julian! my poor Julian! I have repaid your goodness basely. I have brought shame upon the name you hold so dear. Heaven may forgive me, but you never can!"

How weary she was, how her limbs ached! Ay, but the ache in her heart was worse! That would never end save with death!

"Oh! I have sinned deeply. Heaven have mercy upon me!" and with that unspoken prayer repeated again and again in the depths of her heart she came at last to her brother's garden.

The air was laden with the perfume of roses and pinks. The tall white lilies were almost ready to burst into blossom, and looking round on the peaceful scene, inhaling the old familiar scents, she could have shrieked aloud. But by an almost superhuman effort she maintained her self-control, and going forward knocked lightly at the door.

The old servant cried out in surprise to see her there so late; but Nora putting her gently aside, said,—

"I want Julian, if you please!" and went straight into her brother's presence.

"Nora! you here, and the hour so late! What has happened? Great heavens, how ill you look!"

CHAPTER VII.

SHE went forward, and, kneeling beside him, laid her face upon his knee.

"I am very unhappy, Julian, and I could not rest to-night without seeing you. Do not think me very foolish; I—I was compelled to come!"

With gentle hands he lifted the pallid face.

"You are in trouble. Little sister, tell me all about it. I shall then see better how to help you. Has Mrs. Selwyn been unusually trying? Look here, Nora, you shan't submit to that woman's tyranny any longer. I am expecting, almost daily, to be ordered out to India. Come with

me, and I will do my best to make you happy!"

She took one strong hand gently between her little palms, and kissed it.

"You are too good to me, brother! I never realised how good until to-night. I never loved or valued you enough. Oh, Julian! if I had but the past time again how differently I would act!"

"Dear, you are morbid! There never was a more loving little soul than you; and it has been a great grief to me that I could not provide for you as I wished. But now let us risk all! I shall never marry."

At the tone of his voice she looked up quickly.

"You love Hildegard! I have thought so before. Oh! Julian, she is worth winning!" Then, remembering her sin, and her friend's pride, she bowed her head, thinking bitterly, "I have spoiled his life too. She would never wear a tarnished name!"

Julian neither denied nor affirmed. After a brief silence, he said,—

"I have been wanting to speak with you for some time, Nora. Curious rumours have reached me, and I have been indignant over them; but now, seeing how wretched you are, I am inclined to credit them in a measure. Tell me, dear, is it true you have been in the habit of meeting Selwyn clandestinely?"

"Forgive me, Julian. I—I loved him! I trusted him!"

"Only to find yourself deceived. I am inexpressibly grieved that you should have made sport for his idle hours!"

"No, no, no!" in greatest agitation.

"He loves me, Julian, I swear that! But we are both so poor, and—and—"

"And having won your heart he now casts it aside, and will marry the heiress. I understand your misery now. You have but just learned the truth! Nora, I am afraid you have been very foolish!"

"Forgive me; I have been sorely punished."

"I could forgive you anything but actual disgrace. Thank Heaven, you will never bring that upon me!"

Lower and lower sank the beautiful dark head.

"Surely, if you loved me, you would even forgive me that?" she said, in a low, uncertain voice.

"I could not!" with conviction; "but there is small need to talk of what will never be," and he gently smoothed her soft hair. "I would rather follow you to the grave, Nora, than live to be ashamed of you!"

A strong shuddering seized her, and the words she would have spoken died on her lips, whilst all her heart cried out to him to cease.

"From your earliest childhood," he said, "I have watched over you, loved you with almost fatherly care and love; and when I was younger and more hopeful I used to think what great things I would do for you. Dreams! dreams! nothing but dreams! I am still nothing but a poor soldier, and you a little, lonely, helpless girl. I would give ten years of my life to see you happily placed!"

"Oh, don't, Julian! Every word you speak stabs me to the heart. I have deserved so little from you, I am so immeasurably your inferior, and your kindness so far exceeds my merits!"

"No, no! But, Nora, if you really think so highly of me, you will try to please me in one thing?"

"What is it, Julian?"

"You will promise from to-night to have nothing to do with Selwyn."

"All is over between us," she said, in a low voice. "I shall not be guilty of any

farther—any further folly, and I will not trouble you again."

Then, with an exceedingly bitter cry, she flung her arms about his neck.

"Kiss me, my brother, kiss me; and always, come what may, keep a tender spot in your heart for your poor, unhappy Nora. If I wound you in the future, if I am guilty of rashness, and impatient to be free of my lot, try to put yourself in my place; and—and oh! in all, through all, love and forgive me still!"

She was sobbing wildly now; and Julian, more alarmed for her than he cared to show, said,—

"Hush! hush, dear! 'It is absolutely necessary you should control yourself; and you shall stay here to-night. I will go and acquaint Mrs. Selwyn with your decision, and to-morrow we will talk over our plans."

"You must not go! I have pained and worried you unnecessarily, but I am calmer now, and am ready to return. Indeed, I would rather. And there is no need for you to come with me. I shall meet no one on the road, and the night is very light."

"You little wilful thing. If you will go back, well, I have no more to say; but you don't suppose I am scamp enough to let you go alone?"

Nora saw there was no help for it, so together they went out, the girl stopping to kiss old Dorcas, who was surprised at such a sign of affection from her usually undemonstrative nursing.

At the gate she paused, and looked with longing eyes towards the cottage.

"How peaceful it is!" she said, aloud. In her heart she was saying, "I shall never see it any more—never any more! It is better so!"

In almost utter silence brother and sister went down the quiet road, and at Mrs. Selwyn's gates they paused. Nora, lifting herself on tiptoe, drew down Julian's face to her level.

"Dear, good-night, good-bye! Heaven bless and keep you! Heaven prosper you in all your doings, and make you happy!"

Her cold face was pressed to his; her lips met his in a last, long kiss. He wondered then over her farewell words, her passionate caress. To-morrow he would understand better. To-morrow! Oh, that poor unhappy girl! that poor unhappy girl!

"To-morrow," he said, "I shall have arranged our future. Good-night, dear!" and so he left her.

She went a little way into the grounds, listening all the while to his retreating footsteps, and when they died away in the distance she turned back to the gates. One glance she gave at Darnley's window. A faint light was burning there.

"Good-bye!" she said, "good-bye! Heaven forgive us both, and restore you your lost happiness!" and so she went out into the night—the night so calm and peaceful, so heedless of her anguish—and made her way through some adjacent fields.

Then she saw the shining, level river, with its fringe of flowers and rushes. A sob rose to her lips, but her eyes were dry.

She lifted her hands to the clear, starlit sky in agonised prayer; and then—then came the splash as of some heavy object flung into the water. Afterwards a white face shone above and disappeared below the surface three times. Then the ripples closed over it, and the river flowed on as peacefully as though it nursed no tender body, lulled no aching heart beneath its level flow. Alas, poor Nora!

What a glorious morning it was! Every blade of grass, every flower sparkled under its weight of dew. The birds made music

under the eaves, and broke into fuller song where the trees cast deeper shadows over the long lush grass.

The Selwyns sat at breakfast—Darnley moody and pale, Hildegard openly anxious and disdainful.

"Miss Marston is late in coming to plead her cause!" said Mrs. Selwyn.

"I do not see she has any cause to plead. Being so ill her brother's house was surely her proper place of rest. Captain Marston will give her all the attention she needs," said the princess.

Darnley glanced apprehensively at her, but Hildegard's innocent face disarmed his suspicions. Mrs. Selwyn said—

"If you treat all menials in this way, Hildegard, you will never be fit to govern a household."

"I should like to remember always, madam, that my servants are human like myself, and you forget Miss Marston is a lady."

"Captain Marston desires to see you, ma'am," said a servant standing in the open doorway. "He says his business is of great importance!"

"Show him in!" and, forgetful of all courtesy, Mrs. Selwyn kept her seat, whilst the Captain entered, with a bow, which included the trio. He said, gravely—

"Mrs. Selwyn, I am most anxious about Nora, and, with your permission, will at once remove her from a home I fear is not too happy for her. She is ill, and I would like to recruit her strength, if possible, before we go to India!"

"You are evidently labouring under a misapprehension," the lady retorted, coldly. "Miss Marston left here last night without my knowledge or sanction, ostensibly to spend the night at Swallow's Neck. We have not seen her since!"

With a passionate gesture Julian turned to Darnley.

"What do you know of this, you scoundrel? Where is she? Give me back my sister, or by Heaven I will murder you!"

Hildegard moved quickly to Julian's side.

"Do nothing rash, I beg! Remember we know nothing yet. Nora is not here. We believed she was to spend last night with you."

"Not here!" agitatedly, "I brought her to these very gates myself. She was depressed and ill. I promised to remove her from this house, knowing the scanty kindness she received from you, madam! Ask your son what share he has had in her disappearance—what drove her to leave this inhospitable roof?"

But before Darnley could reply a servant rushed in regardless of all ceremony.

"Oh, ma'am! oh, Miss Hildegard! they have found Miss Marston! Old Ives, the miller, pulled her out of the river a little while ago! but she's quite dead, there's no doubt of that!"

"Dead! Drowned!" cried Mrs. Selwyn, for once genuinely agitated. "What do you mean, girl? Hildegard, this is some foolish gossip!"

But Darnley did not speak. He stood like a statue of despair. And looking from him to Julian, the "princess" feared there was worse to come.

"Nora—dead!" said Captain Marston, under his breath, "little Nora!"

Then, leaping forward, he caught Darnley by the throat.

"You villain! This is your doing!" But Hildegard grasped him by the arm.

"A moment's patience, I pray you! Darnley, can you tell us nothing!"

With a horrible groan he covered his face. "I have nothing to say but that I am a scoundrel, and deserve to be hung!"

"What do you mean Darnley?" cried his mother. "How are you concerned in this—this terrible affair?"

"She should have been my wife! I had promised her marriage!"

"Do you mean that she—she drowned herself because you broke your promise?"

"Heaven forgive me! there is worse to hear! There was every reason why she should have been my wife? Back, Marston! you are choking me!" as Julian rushed upon him. But the shock of his sister's death was too great for him, and he fell back in a huddled heap upon the couch.

"I deserve that you should kill me!" said Darnley, in a hoarse whisper. "I loved her, and I ruined her! No fate is too cruel for me!"

He lifted his eyes to Hildegard's condemning face.

"You are right," she said, in a thrilling voice. "You are too low for hate, and beneath contempt! Your presence here is an insult to humanity! Oh, Nora! Nora! if I had but known I might have saved you!" Then, turning to Julian, she said, "Come, it may be there is hope for her; it may be she is not dead!"

He looked up in a dazed way, unconscious of all save Nora's terrible end; and, rising, staggered towards the door. Then he paused, and leaning on the "princess," said,—

"When I have done all there is to do for her I will have my reckoning with you! This means death for one of us!" and then together they passed out, Hildegard's last look falling on Darnley, who knelt by the table, his face hidden in his hands, his whole figure convulsed with violent sobs.

There she lay, so white, so still, so silent! her sweet face unmarred; not a wound or a mark upon it to deface its beauty. What though the whole county rang with the story of her shame and her wrongs? She recked little now. She had found peace at last; and even Julian's bitter cry, "Nora! my sister! I helped to bring this to pass!" moved her not at all. "I said I would forgive all but disgrace! that I would rather follow you to the grave than know you had tarnished our name; and now I would give the world to have you back again! My girl! my girl! did you know me so little, that you could not trust me?"

A slow and heavy step startled him. He rose, and waited for the new comer to join him; but as the pitiless light fell full upon Darnley's haggard face, he cried,—

"Back! as you value your life! You forget, I have not yet avenged her shame!"

"Let me look upon her once more! Remember, I loved her too!"

"If you dare to come a step nearer I will murder you!"

Darnley was not physically a coward, and he still attempted to enter the long bare, room, but a hand touched his arm, and a low voice said,—

"Come away! Do not insult the dead and the mourner by your futile grief! Your sorrow and repentance are too late! You should have made atonement yesterday! To-day it is all in vain!" and, meeting the stern regard of Hildegard's eyes, he suffered himself to be drawn away.

Urged on by his mother's fears of Julian's revenge, and acting on Hildegard's advice, that night he left Lesley secretly, not to reappear for many years; never, in the dreary future, to bear more than a faint likeness to his former self; always to be haunted by the memory of a pale young face with anguished eyes; of a young life wrecked in its early morning; always in his inmost heart to know himself a murderer, an unclean creature unworthy a good

woman's love, an honest man's esteem or friendship!

The funeral was over. A merciful jury had pronounced their verdict, "Suicide whilst temporarily insane," and poor Nora received Christian burial.

Great sympathy was shown by the county families, with whom Julian was a favourite, and a hero; but the unhappy man writhed under it.

He was so unused to shame, and he took great blame to himself that he had not guarded poor Nora more carefully, wrongfully accused himself of urging her on to her desperate deed by those words of his:

"I would rather follow you to the grave, Nora, than live to be ashamed of you!"

Sitting all alone, his head bowed upon his arms, he heard the door open and did not glance up, thinking it was only poor faithful Dorcas, until the sound of rich garments swept the ground, and the touch of a white, soft hand warned him who was his visitor. And lifting his head, his heavy eyes rested on the pale and perfect face of "Princess Hildegarde."

Almost before he realised the truth, she was on her knees beside him, her eyes looking love and pity into his, her hands clasped about his arms, and he heard the music of her low voice speaking such words as he had never thought to hear again.

"Julian! I could not stay away from you, knowing your sorrow and loneliness. I had been unworthy the name of woman if I could. Oh! my dear, my dear, what shall I say to comfort you?"

He passed his hand caressingly over her unsightly tresses.

"You are good, most good, and none but a generous woman would have ventured to a place over which the shadow of shame is brooding!"

"We will forget the shame, and remember only her sorrow and despair. We will think of her, Julian, as she was before this bitter wrong was done her. Oh! my dear, my dear! do not think me over-bold or unmaidenly; but knowing your pride, and fearing it may spoil all our lives—yours and mine—I come to offer you all my love and all my life! In all the world you stand alone! You are unhappy, and it should be my task to comfort you. Forget your pride, I pray you, and do not bid me leave you!"

In utter amazement he looked at her.

"Hildegarde, do you know what you ask? You have everything the world holds dear—I, nothing. Surely you would not venture to cast in your lot with mine? I have nothing to give—"

"Save love," she interrupted, "and love is more than all!"

He bowed his face upon her head.

"Oh, my darling! my darling! I cannot send you from me! It was hard enough before—it would be death now. Stay with me, sweetheart, wife!"

And then she was in his arms, and he felt with a passionate throb of gratitude she was all his own, and in a new-found humility thanked Heaven for its mercy.

Society said, with her great advantages, Hildegarde should have made a much better match; but if she knew this she did not heed it.

The wedding (a very quiet one) took place in town, and there were no bridesmaids, although the princess did not forget her old companions. But following so sharply on Nora's death she felt any festivity would be unseemly, so that Miss Collett and old Dorcas were the only witnesses.

Long, long after, Darnley and his delicate wife returned to Lesley; but he was sorely

changed. The shadow of his sin rested always upon him, and it was almost impossible to recognise the old debonaire Darnley in this grave, sad-faced man, whom many pitied, although, indeed, he richly deserved his punishment.

And far away in India, a fair woman of queenly presence rules her husband's house wisely and well. Is the idol of her children and the lover for whom she counted the world well lost; the darling of the society in which she still moves, and lives as "Princess Hildegarde!"

[THE END.]

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By EFFIE ADILAIDE ROWLANDS.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Valentine Eyre is riding through a forest in Spain when his attention is arrested by the sight of the beautiful gipsy girl Zitella. Valentine ascertains that she is betrothed to Hermann, a member of the gipsy band, and he would spare her if possible from a loveless marriage. Valentine undertakes to adopt Zitella, and she is sent to England to be educated. Valentine's wife is reported dead, but in reality she still lives. Zitella's education being completed she determines to use the influence of Valentine's position and power to further her own ambitious ends. Summoned to his father's death bed, Valentine learns that he has no right to any name but his mother's, and the estates being entailed go to his brother Hermann. On his return home he finds that Zitella has fled, and he is now searching for her abroad. His first impulse on meeting her is to kill her for her unfaithfulness. Valentine spares her life, however, only to be stabbed with his own dagger and at the hand of Hermann. Meanwhile Churchill Penance has fallen in love with the beautiful Inez, and realises too late that he has been duped.

CHAPTER XIII.

FEW years later Churchill Penance went to Florence.

He had been drawn thither by reports of a woman whose marvellous beauty was taking the whole city by storm, and though the young Englishman heard her spoken of as a lady of rank and boundless wealth, the description which he received of her personal appearance was that of Inez Valdez, for whom his love had not yet died out.

So he went to Florence, and there, as fate would have it, met with an old friend who at once offered him an introduction to the house of the latest Florentine notoriety, a beautiful Hungarian, whose father's unjustly confiscated estates had been restored to her, and who had been created a Countess in her own right—a wild story, which was never questioned by anyone who had once seen the lovely heroine of it; for as Churchill learned from his friend, the Countess Czarras charmed men and women alike, so that all were ready to fall down at her feet and worship her.

So Churchill went to the temple of this goddess, and found, he had expected, Inez Valdez.

The blood receded from his cheek as he stood before her among throngs of distinguished guests, and his heart seemed for several moments to cease to beat; but she received him with a smile, in which there was no trace of fear or guilt. She even pressed his hand, thereby making him an object of envy to the assembled guests, and breathed, in a brief passionate whisper, the assurance that this was a moment for which she had hungered through months which seemed like years; and then turning to the man who had introduced Churchill, she thanked him most warmly for having restored to her such a dear friend as Mr. Penance.

Later on, as she flitted by, Zitella whispered in Churchill's ear that he must remain until "these people," with an impatient wave of her hand had departed, and then if he still took any interest in her she would relate to him all the sorrows and vicissitudes through which she had gone since their last meeting. And Churchill, though he hated himself for his weakness, remained, and that night while half Florence talked angry of the inconsequent looking young Englishman, to whom the Countess, cold to all others, had been so gracious, Churchill sat at Zitella's feet and heard her tale.

She began at the beginning, and told it all with an appearance of candour which would have misled one less trustful than her listener.

Yes, Hermann, the gipsy, had been her playmate in childhood, and their elders had betrothed them, and then Valentine Eyre had come by and carried her off to England and educated her, and, out of gratitude, she had been ready to marry him, until she discovered that the marriage would only be an empty form, for Valentine Eyre had a wife alive; and when she, poor innocent Zitella, learned this, she had taken advantage of her false lover's absence to escape to her native land, and on the way she had met a widow called Inez Valdez, who wore a very strange resemblance to herself.

"And so," said Zitella, weeping, "when poor Inez died on the voyage, having confided to me every particular of her life story, I, desolate and penniless, thought it no harm to pass myself off as the daughter-in-law of the old Pedro Valdez; and only for Valentine Eyre I should probably be with him now. But when I heard from you that that false villain was in Rio San Vozeg I determined, rather than fall into his unscrupulous hands, to go forth once more upon the world. And so, knowing that one of the ladies, whose children I taught, was leaving in haste for Italy, and wanted a maid, I went to her and offered my services, which were immediately accepted, and so before sunset that evening we were out of the town."

"Some day," continued Zitella; "I will introduce you to that lady, who is now in England, and she will tell you how I remained with her until an accident brought me under the notice of a Hungarian prince, who was instrumental in restoring to me the title and lands of which my father had been unjustly deprived."

After this there remained not a doubt in Churchill's mind of Zitella's truth. That part of her life which had been spent in London was all unknown to him. At that time Churchill Penance had been occupied with other matters. He was ready to kill himself for having ever doubted her; but the only atonement he could make her was to love her more madly than ever man had loved a woman.

So, while away in England, poor Mrs. Penance waited in vain for a time from her son. Churchill was wasting all his substance in magnificent presents to Zitella,



ZITELLA SANK DOWN WEEPING AND SOBBING BITTERLY, AS IF IN ABANDONMENT OF SOME INCONSOLABLE GRIEF.

(Illustrating the splendid romance *UNSEEN FIRES*.)

who, never, by any chance alluded to the fact that she had received from some unknown donor a set of diamonds which an empress might have hesitated to purchase; but though she never alluded to the jewels or wore them, she had a way, when they were alone, of calling Churchill a poor, foolish boy, and scolding him lovingly, which made the young man feel sure that she knew from whom the costly presents had come.

But though he loved so madly Churchill was not happy, for after the first gush of tenderness in their unexpected reunion was over, Zitella was cold to him as to all the rest.

She allowed him to be alone with her, and to be at her feet pouring out his heart in praise of her beauty; but whenever he hinted at marriage she became cold as ice at once, and then the young man would be sent away full of miserable, jealous doubt and fears, but feeling more than anything else that he had offended his love beyond all hope of forgiveness.

One night the lovely Countess Czarvas sat alone in her favourite room, in which only the dimmest lights were burning beneath amber shades.

The Countess herself was *en deshabille*; her exquisite form was enveloped in a loose wrapper of white cashmere, her hair was lying unloosed on her shoulders; her face was white; her red and swollen eyelids gave such evidence of long and violent weeping, that she laughed softly as she looked into the small hand mirror on the table by her side.

"I could almost hate myself," she muttered. "I look such a miserable, contemptible object. Oh! if there are any women who ever really weep what fools they must be! But this temporary disfigurement—"

Suddenly Zitella paused, dropping the mirror, and caught up her daintily embroidered handkerchief. There was a step in the corridor outside—the swift, joyous tread of a man hastening to the side of the woman he adores.

Zitella drew a quick breath, which showed that she was not altogether devoid of fear, and threw herself forward on the arms of her chair as if in the abandonment of some inconsolable grief; then, as the door opened and the visitor entered, fierce, passionate sobs broke from her lips.

In a moment Churchill Penance was at her side. He was kneeling by her chair and drawing her into his embrace—was covering the hands which veiled her face with passionate kisses.

For awhile she yielded passively, as if her grief were too violent for any other thought; then, as if suddenly remembering her position, she broke away from him, and revealing her white grief-stained face for one moment, averted the next, exclaiming in choking tones,—

"And you, too, take advantage of my helpless womanhood to insult me. Oh, what shall I do—where turn to find a friend?"

"Zitella!" exclaimed Churchill, in accents of the most profound astonishment and reproach, "I insult you—I take advantage of you! What do you mean?"

"Oh! I am mad!" she sobbed, hysterically. "Do not blame me—do not question me; only go and leave me to my fate!"

"Now you are mad when you wrong me so," cried Churchill. "Oh, my darling; unless you drive me away from you I will not leave you;" and then seizing her small, trembling hands in his he covered them once more with kisses, and poured forth all

his heart, and besought her in one fevered breath to confide in him the cause of her grief; but it was not until he had changed his tone, and commanded her with the sternness of a master, that Zitella would speak. Then, with every appearance of terror, she sobbed forth,—

A Gambler's Downfall!

There is no question as to the evil results of betting and gambling. It is responsible for the breaking-up of many happy homes, and is known to have ruined thousands, and spoilt the lives of numbers of innocent women and children.

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contains a warning to all addicted to this evil practice.

Men have been known, like the central figure in this impressive story, to end by gambling in human lives.

The LONDON READER contains many attractive



LADY FORTESCUE STARTED, A STRANGE IDEA HAD SEIZED HER.

(Illustrating the brilliant story IVY'S PERIL.)

"It is that wicked, unscrupulous Valentine Eyre. He has pursued me, and threatens to ruin me with all my friends. And, oh! what shall I do, for he has neither conscience nor fear, and has trumped up proof of his story which the world cannot but believe, because, alas! I have no witness against him but my word."

And Zitella sank down once more, weeping and sobbing more bitterly than before; but Churchill sprang to his feet, almost rejoicing that the hour had come in which he could settle his long-owed score with Valentine Eyre. But when he spoke loudly of avenging Zitella without delay she only sobbed more piteously, and entreated—nay, commanded—that he would not go to Valentine Eyre.

"He will take your life," she wailed, "and then I shall have lost my only true friend; for how can I count on those butterflies of fashion who only surround me because I am rich and beautiful? But oh, my friend! I can trust in you because I have proved your worth!"

Churchill's passionate resentment died out for a moment, and bending on his knees before her he pressed his lips to her hand.

"Your lightest word is my law," he said, gently, "but in this I cannot obey you; for even though I lose my life in your defence, I must punish Valentine Eyre for the insult he has offered you, and force his lies down his throat. If he is in Florence—"

"He is in Florence," interrupted Zitella, "at the Hotel Madelina— Oh! Heaven, what have I done?" and hiding her face, Zitella shrieked aloud, "Now you will go and insult him, and pay with your life the penalty, or else you will listen to his story, and believe his word against mine!"

Once more Churchill sprang to his feet and stood before Zitella for a moment in angry silence.

"I swear before Heaven," he exclaimed at last, "that if that d—d villain utters one word against you I will shoot him like a dog, and then may I never behold you again if I am such a false traitor as you would make me out!" and then, without another word or look at the beautiful, crouching form, Churchill Penance dashed from the apartment and down a staircase of marble, which had once been trodden by the feet of emperors.

In less than an hour Churchill was at his own villa, which lay in a charming spot about nine miles outside Florence, and which, in the hope of making Zitella his wife, he had furnished, regardless of expense. Here he waited but to provide himself with a revolver and order fresh horses, when he entered his carriage once more, and was driven back to Florence.

They stopped at the Hotel Madelina, and learned that Mr. Valentine Eyre, an Englishman, was at present staying there; and in a few minutes Churchill stood in the presence of Hermann the gipsy, who, for the last eighteen months had successfully passed himself off as the brother who was still immured in his prison at Rio San Vozgez.

But even if the difference between this man and the former Valentine Eyre had been noticeable Churchill was too excited to notice it; and suspecting nothing, he began in his most imperious tones to demand an apology for the insult which had been offered to his friend the Countess Czarvas.

Hermann regarded the young man with a pitying smile, as he replied,—

"I would have you kicked down the stairs for your insolence but that I am so sorry

for you, because you have been befooled by that arch fiend—"

"Say that again!" thundered Churchill, furiously.

"A thousand times if you wish to hear it," replied the other, coolly. "You are a fool, and Zitella is a fiend. She sent you here in the hope that we would fight and you should take my life; for while I live no man can win her, and she knows it. But now listen!"

"Not a word," cried Churchill, white with fury. "There, coward and liar, take that!"

* * * * *

The bullet sped home, and as the smoke cleared away Churchill bent over the prostrate form of his foe. He felt as yet neither remorse nor fear, for that Zitella had been revenged was his one thought; but still he bent over the fallen man, and as he removed the covering from his breast his hand came in contact with a letter, and, as he moved it hastily aside, he saw that the writing was Zitella's, and caught words which impelled him to read more.

"I am sending my English lover to you," read Churchill, "for he is tiresome and dangerous, and if you were to appear here he would make a scene. He will quarrel with you, and a shot will settle the difficulty."

After this Churchill could read no more, for the paper had become soaked with the blood which was flowing from Hermann's wound; but he had read sufficient to prove in what an evil cause he had sinned. Then crushing the letter up in his hand, and cursing her who had penned it, Churchill opened the door and passed downstairs, wondering that no one appeared to arrest his footsteps.

features in addition to its popular stories.

He thought that the hotel must be deserted, as the shot just fired seemed to attract no attention, and so he proceeded to his carriage, and was driven rapidly away.

As he passed the hotel where he sometimes dined when in Florence, Churchill saw one of his own servants from the villa; and seeing his master's carriage, the man signalled the coachman to stop, when he handed a telegram through the window of the carriage, and with a sudden fearful prevision of ill tidings Churchill tore open the envelope, and read a message bidding him hasten home if he would see his mother alive.

Within the hour Churchill Penance was on his way to England.

CHAPTER XIV.

It is many years later, and on the fore-runner of a lovely day, two people are seated in a boat gliding with a current down a peaceful English river.

One of these is a young girl, who seems too bright and beautiful for the land of grey mists and shrouded suns in which destiny has placed her. She looks like some exquisite tropical which has been transplanted from a Southern home.

Her dark large eyes, though loving and tender as eyes can be, are full of the slumberous fire that belongs to the land where—

"The flowers ever blossom
The beams ever shine."

The hue of pomegranate blossoms is in her fair young cheek, but the sweet, tremulous mouth, with lips formed like a Cupid's bow, is the very embodiment of womanly tenderness.

The girl's form though slender and pliant as a willow wand, seems already perfectly formed; and her white gown, which is made with Quakerish plainness, seems to have acquired from the wearer a grace and air of distinction that an Englishwoman might have failed to impart to it.

Yet Romola De Nunaz is as yet utterly unconscious of her own beauty; or, if she ever gives her charms a thought, it is to rejoice in the fact that she is a pleasant study to her companion.

For the young girl has watched Churchill Penance faithfully, and she knows that his eyes are never so tender, his smile so sweet as when they rest on her. It is not because Romola is shallow or thoughtless that she never dreams of the scorpion tooth of remorse which knows ceaselessly within the breast of Churchill Penance, but because he conceals the truth so well.

Once or twice the young girl has seen a heavy shadow lying on the fair, handsome face, and her heart has ached with the only pain she has ever known. But at the sound of her voice, the touch of her hand, the shadow has vanished, and she has stilled her heart with the assurance that it "was only fancy."

But all is brightness this morning, as they drift down the stream. The sun shines with a will, and the lark over head pours forth his heavenly song.

"And singing still dost soar,
And soaring ever singest."

The glide past fields of ripening corn on one side, and on the other stately trees that cast their cool shadows over the water. There are ancient cedars and quivering aspens murmuring, silver leaved poplars, and wide spreading oaks and elms, beneath anyone of which a hundred people at least could have sheltered.

These are the trees that surround Lockesley Hall, the home in which Romola De Nunaz has grown up; and as the boat sweeps round a sudden corner in the river

the ancient grey is seen through a vista in the trees.

"You love your home, dear!" says Churchill, seeing the tender light which dwains in the girl's eyes.

"I love it because all those I love best are there: it is that which makes home."

And this simple answer speaks of the young girl's character what volumes might have conveyed.

"I thought to love Lockesley Hall," continues the girl. "I have never had a care or sorrow here. It seems to me that love and happiness are everlasting, and yet I tremble, sometimes, for what I have done to deserve so many blessings, when many far better than I am are so troubled and sorrowful."

"My dear, do not talk so," exclaimed Churchill, in a tone of pain. "You are good, you are innocent and loving. Why should you not be happy?"

Romola's sweet face paled, then quivered with excess of emotion.

"If I am perfectly happy," she said, softly, "it is because Heaven is good, and not that I am worthy."

Churchill looked at the young girl as if he would have liked to fold her to his heart and thank her for those words; and had he done so she would not have been angry or frightened, for this man was the friend of her childhood; but however strong his impulse may have been he restrained it, and said, passionately,—

"I could not call Heaven good, or just, if it were to afflict you, and child," he added, tenderly, "do not count sorrow, for it can never fall on you without bruising the hearts of those who love you. But there, let us leave this sad theme, and chase one more in unison with your youth and this beautiful morning. Look at those water lilies, Roma, and those lovely cardinal plants! I declare I have an artist's eye, and can tell how well that crimson would look against your dark hair! Will you wear some to-night, if I gather them for you?"

"I would deck my head with nettles at your request," was Romola's laughing reply; whereupon Churchill pushed the boat to the edge of the bank, and soon a great heap of the scarlet flowers lay in Romola's lap, and she had to beg of her companion that he would not gather any more.

The boat drifted on. The lark's song swelled louder and louder, and Romola toyed with the flowers, which were so precious because of the giver. He could scarcely see her down-bent face because of the wide-brimmed, shady hat; but was not every line, every look which it had ever worn deeply engraven on his heart—the heart that endured such bitter remorse, such vain longing! That he could undo the past, that he could retrace the path of time, and live a life worthy of a man and of Romola!

Ten years ago Churchill Penance had fled from the scene of his crime, hoping, almost praying, wildly that the mother might die before she heard her son called a murderer. For what might happen afterwards he had little care, for had not the worst happened that could happen to him? But, too late, filial love had made it his one wish that his mother should die in the happy possession of her faith in him.

But Mrs. Penance did not die, for the sight of her son brought her back, as it were, from death to life. And though many weeks passed before those who watched her dared to breathe freely, still the anxiety which had laid her low was over; and gradually she was restored to health and strength. But every loving, hopeful word which she uttered was an arrow in her son's heart. Every time he blessed him he fled

from her presence, and bowed his head in an agony of shame, and terror beyond all description.

Everywhere the young man turned he saw the story of his crime—the brand of Cain was in his soul. But for his mother it would make no difference whether men pointed it on his forehead or not. It was not for himself that he lived in daily terror of being found out by the officers of the law, and called to answer for his crime; for the man who has stood in the felon's dock and heard his death sentence passed could not feel more guilty and self-loathing than did Churchill Penance. Yet those around him never guessed aught of the tortures he endured; and though his mother feasted in secret over his filial humour and haggard face, she attributed the change in his appearance to anxiety on her account. And there was none to tell her that her son never now slept in a bed, for after pacing his room all night the unhappy young man would never fall to avert suspicion by leaving the dressing of his couch in wild disorder.

So a year passed, and as yet no whisper of Churchill's crime had come home to him. But for this he never deceived himself into his belief, or even hoped that he would escape punishment. His remorse and self-loathing were too bitter for that; but as time went by he took courage to pray that, great as his sin had been, mercy would be shown to him, that the consequences of his deed should fall on him alone.

At the close of the year, which had brought her son home, Mrs. Penance had received an invitation from Mrs. Aligham to come and spend some weeks at Lockesley Hall. She was anxious to accept it, but would not leave her son, who had at first refused to go; and so, sorely against his will, Churchill accompanied her.

The young man found that his memory had been most tenderly cherished at Lockesley Hall. Little Romola sprang to meet him, calling him her dear, dear Mr. Penance, and the innocent words and loving caresses were like balm to Churchill's sore, fevered heart; but, though he knew it not then, the worst part of his punishment had begun.

But he knew it when that visit was repeated again and again, and he watched Romola growing from a child to the sweetest, noblest maiden Heaven had ever moulded, and knew that he loved her with a love which he dared not confess.

Had he done right he would have gone away before any hurt could come to her from his society. But he loathed himself too deeply ever to dream that any young girl could love him, and he cheated himself into the belief that when Romola looked on him with the clear eyes of womanhood her childlike love and faith in him would die out, but he never thought of what this disillusion would cost Romola.

But this morning, as they glided down the stream, Romola was full seventeen, and Churchill was still the god of her idolatry; and at the very moment in which he was saying to himself that she gave him but the affection of a child these thoughts were agitating the young girl's heart.

"Oh! he is so true, so noble! Who is there in the world like him? But I am only an ignorant child, and some day he will love some beautiful lady more of his own age, and nobler and cleverer than I could ever be, and I must try to be very glad because he is happy. But I shall never love anyone as I love him!"

But when Churchill asked the girl of what she was thinking she raised a bright face to his, and replied—

"Of a great many things, but one of them

I will tell you. I was wondering what has brought the Duchess of Stanislough to the country at this time of the year!"

Churchill smiled as he replied,—

"I hear that Miss Drood is also at the Castle, and I fear that both those ladies will say it is no more than they expected if they see me in grey tweed when I ought to be in mourning for my Cousin Eastshire!"

"Victorine, my maid, told me to-day," said Romola, "that you must be Marquis of Eastshire now, as the late Marquis's brother is supposed to have been killed abroad."

"Egerton St. George, alias Hugo Brand, has not been heard of for years," replied Churchill; "but that is no reason why I should assume the title, as I distinctly refuse to do. In all probability, St. George will appear suddenly some of these days."

"Should you like very much to be a marquis?" asked Romola, a little wistfully. And in sharp tones Churchill replied,—

"Not at all. On the contrary, it is the last thing I should wish for."

He was going to add this question, "Do you think a title could add aught to me?" but was heartily glad that he refrained from doing so, when, with a little sigh of relief, Romola replied,—

"I am glad of that, for I was half hoping Mr. St. George would return, because quiet Lockesly Hall is no place for marquis."

"So much the better for me," said Churchill; and then he could not refrain from taking the little hand from among the red flowers and pressing it to his lips. But though many sweet, lover-like words trembled on his lips, he uttered none of them. And soon the boat grated on the shingly sand by their usual landing-place, and as he helped Romola on shore Churchill felt that his hour of paradise was at an end; for it was only when quite alone with Romola that he could find peace.

They struck into a side path beneath a stately arch of trees, and too soon the house was won.

As they crossed the hall the sound of female voices floated through the open drawing-room, and Churchill's cheeks crimsoned, and he muttered some words which even his companion's presence could not restrain; but ere he could make his escape the drawing-room door was opened to its fullest extent, and forth came the Duchess, followed by the Hon. Ethel Drood.

The Duchess of Stanislough bore down on the mortified young man.

"Mr. Penance," she said, holding out a plump, well-gloved hand, "we have been twelve years estranged, and it was only pride which prevented me from acknowledging that I was hasty and unjust on the occasion of our last meeting; but to-day I have owned my error, and your dear mother has forgiven me. Will you not for her sake be as generous?"

"For my mother's sake I would do anything!" replied Churchill, quickly; but he made no attempt to clasp the Duchess's hand, nor did he look into her face to see the effect of his words as he went on.

"But I never felt any resentment towards your Grace for having been assured that I had behaved towards one of your guests in a manner unworthy of a gentleman. You had no choice but to act as you did."

"But I assure you I misunderstood Ethel," exclaimed the Duchess. "It was unpardonably stupid, of course, and what the dear girl has suffered since I cannot—"

"Duchess!" interrupted Churchill, and his face grew first crimson, then livid, "if my mother and you are friends no more need be said. Let us decide that it was a mistake, and drop the matter."

"Will you not forgive me?" asked Ethel Drood, as the Duchess moved aside to speak to Romola, whom she patted on the cheek, and addressed as her sweet child.

Churchill felt very much embarrassed as Miss Drood slipped her hand into his. He looked into her face, which was beginning, in spite of art, to show the ravages of warfare with the world and ungratified hopes, and he almost smiled as he wondered how he could ever have fancied himself in love with her; but the next moment he remembered that he should be the last to cast a stone at her. And when she repeated her words he said gently, in a very low voice—

"My dear Miss Drood, you have no right to beg my pardon, for I am sure I deserved to be sent to Coventry, because, in my anger that day, I said a great many rude, insulting things, and all because I had been conceited enough to fancy that you cared for me. But that was twelve years ago, and a boy never takes misfortune well."

"You do well to remind me that it was twelve years ago," whispered Ethel, and her lips whitened with anger or pain. "But though you were as you say a boy, and I only a child, I loved you then with all my heart. What happened was a bitter mistake, which I have never ceased to regret."

Poor Churchill had never felt so awkward and miserable in all his life as when he listened to these words.

He had despised and scorned Ethel Drood as a false, unscrupulous woman for twelve years, but still she was a woman, and he would not have been a man if he could have seen her degrade herself as she was doing without pitying her.

His face looked as if he had received a blow across it, as he dropped her hand, and whispered back,—

"There is no one but has made some mistake; but I always think it is best, if possible, not to look back."

He spoke coldly and calmly; and though Ethel did not seem stung by his words, it was an inexpressible relief to him when the Duchess interrupted this conversation with the announcement that she was going to give a large ball in a few weeks, at which she hoped all the present inmates of Lockesly Hall would attend.

"The dear child," she said, touching Romola on the shoulder, "is quite old enough to go out now, and it will be a splendid opportunity for her to make her debut."

Mrs. Alingham had emerged from the drawing-room as these words were spoken, and now she stood by her young charge and said, in firm tones,—

"Your Grace is very kind indeed; but you must remember that I only act for Romola's father, who must be consulted as to the time which is fitting for his daughter to appear in society?"

"How strange that Mr. De Nunaz should remain away from England and his charming children!" said the Duchess, who, with the rest of the neighbourhood, was in profound ignorance of the girl's parentage.

It was generally believed that Romola and Juan were the children of a Spanish gentleman, who had sent them to England to be educated, and the fact that Mrs. Alingham was a Spaniard greatly contributed to this idea. And their quiet mode of living lulled curiosity, which might otherwise have been on the alert about them.

But Mrs. Alingham, a white-haired, rather dowdily-dressed old lady, and two children were not objects of absorbing interest, and nobody dreamed that Lockesly Hall belonged to Valentine Eyre, who, if the truth must be told, was only remembered by two women in England.

But least of all did Churchill Penance

dream beneath whose roof-tree he had found a rest.

"Romola's father may return at any moment," said Mrs. Alingham quietly. "But I can always communicate with him through his solicitor, and I must do so before I can give my consent to the child's appearance at your Grace's ball."

"Then I beg you will not let a mail pass," exclaimed the Duchess expressively. "For I want a beauty at my ball who will eclipse all others."

"You are very kind, Duchess," said Mrs. Alingham, in a low voice. "But I would remind you that Romola has been taught that goodness and truth, not beauty, are a woman's best possessions."

"And Romola has all three," rejoined the Duchess prettily, as she moved towards her carriage.

When the visitors had gone, Churchill, though he scarcely knew why he did so, drew Romola aside, and took her hand in his, while he said,—

"Do you know, dear child, that I once was so foolish as to fancy I loved Ethel Drood, who was here just now?"

Romola looked up at him, and for the first time he saw the shadow of trouble in her beautiful eyes.

"And you do not love her now?" she asked with a quivering lip.

"I never loved her with a true love. It was but a foolish boy's fancy."

"But it may have been real to her. It may have ruined her whole life!" said Romola sorrowfully.

And her words went like a knife to Churchill's heart, because of the truth and the intensity that they revealed in her.

"It was not real to her, dear," he replied.

"I was to Miss Drood but an 'eligible parti,'" and then he related calmly and dispassionately all that chapter of his life with which Ethel was connected; but when Romola had listened to the end, she said, gravely,—

"Why do you tell me this? It makes me unhappy to think a woman could do such things."

"I know that," replied Churchill. "But I thought it better to tell you, because now that she thinks I am to be Marquis of Eastshire Miss Drood fancies that she has loved me all her life, and if you were not prepared, she might say misleading things to you."

"I cannot understand," sighed Romola. "If I loved you!"—and then she stopped and dropped her head in confusion, blushing very red.

"You would love me under any circumstances?" put in Churchill, earnestly.

"Yes, I don't understand any other love; but, may I ask you," looking suddenly straight into his eyes, "how many people you have fancied you loved?"

Churchill felt that Romola's dark eyes were looking down into the very depths of his soul; but in the darkest hour of his misery and remorse he remembered with thankfulness that though the temptation to lie was strong then, he had resisted it, and replied,—

"Only one other, dear! Oh, Romola, dear, do not despise me too much, for the woman was very beautiful and very clever. She uttered thoughts to which angels would have loved to listen. She seemed an angel herself, and the love which I gave her was full of reverence; but when I found that she was false and wicked I never looked on her face again."

Romola's lips quivered, and tears fell from her beautiful eyes on Churchill's hand. She was no longer a child. She knew that she loved this man with an undying love; but she was not jealous of the woman whom he had loved because he had believed her to

be an angel. She was sorry that he had suffered, but the thought that he had been noble through all was inexpressibly sweet to her.

Her tears fell on his hand, and Churchill said gently—

"You do not, then, despise me, dear, as a weak man who does not know his own mind?"

"No," she replied, "I think you noble. I do not like to fancy all that you went through before you could give her up; but I should have been sorry if you had not done so."

"If I had really loved her, and not an ideal of my own creation, I could not have forsaken her," argued Churchill.

"Perhaps not; but then if you had known her as she was you would never have loved her!" replied Romola, proudly.

It trembled on the man's tongue to ask her if she could only love one who had never committed any great wilful wrong; but he restrained himself, and said, instead.

"If the day should ever come in which I may dare to love again, may I tell you, Romola?"

There was a moment's silence, during which the girl's head drooped lower and lower; but at last she replied in low, tremulous, tones,—

"Yes, you may tell me, but you must be quite sure that it is real love, and not a fancy."

And as she rolled back to Stanislaugh Castle at this moment, Ethel Drood said to herself,—

"What a fool I have been! I am old and faded, and I might as well hope to put life into a dead body as to rekindle his love for me—if he ever loved me; but I suppose I will have the added bitterness to see him woo and marry that child. Oh! I could slay myself to think of all I have flung away!"

And, as if reading her companion's thoughts the Duchess said aloud, in a musing tone,—

"Churchill Penance used to be a handsome man. I wonder what happened to alter him so dreadfully? But he will not be the only person of consequence at my ball, and I must find a lover for little Romola!"

Then as the carriage went between the arch that spanned the entrance to Stanislaugh Castle Ethel Drood said to herself—

"Romola loves Churchill, and if I can read clearly, she will never love anyone else; but for all that I will not spare her if I can part them. The Duchess seems to think that something happened while he was away. I wonder what it was?"

The carriage drew up before the Castle door, and Miss Drood's musings came, for the time being, to an end.

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 1879. Back Nos. can be obtained through any newsagent.)

AS GIRLS WILL.

All summer she flirted with Thomas and Jack,

With Alec and Leonard and Joe;

But then with the coming of winter went back

To her regular, all-the-year beau.

And married him, too, as girls will, I am told;

Since while they were spending like that, He'd saved, in a purse that was wrinkled

and old,

The money to furnish a flat.

IVY'S PERIL.

CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

"COURAGE, Beresford," said Dr. Ward, gently.

"All may not be lost. The moment I had your note I telegraphed to my young friend here; who is studying at Hastings. I told him to go to the station and watch every train, till he saw two ladies answering to the description I gave him. I said after seven he might consider himself off duty; as I knew, if Mrs. Austin meant flight, she would be off before you could reach Hastings."

Paul started up.

"Dr. Ward, I think you a magician!"

"He's a very knowing fellow," said the boy Ronald, disrespectfully. "Well, guardian I obeyed you implicitly, and followed the two ladies, but they led me such a dance! They went into the Crystal Palace Bazaar, and stayed there for ages."

Ward had pity on Paul Beresford's impatience.

"Do you know where they are now?"

"Yes; at the Grosvenor Hotel. You needn't be in any hurry," for Beresford had started up. "They can't run away, for the younger one (Miss Carew) is ill in bed; old Lullington had just been sent for."

Mark Ward rang the bell (it was by this time getting on for eleven o'clock).

"The brougham at once, Thomas, and I shall not be able to see patients till after twelve."

Paul looked at him.

"What are you going to do?"

"See Lullington at once; I don't like such a decided step, but I dare not lose any time. When once Miss Carew can travel they will remove her again."

"May I come with you?"

"Certainly, Ronald also; though, young man, I shall have to leave you in the brougham. I rather fancy your innocence would shock Dr. Lullington."

Marcus Ward sent in his card with—"on important business," written underneath the name; but, indeed, he had little fear of his confrères refusing to see him.

Lullington had a name as a fashionable ladies' doctor, but he had not a tenth part of the practice which flowed to Marcus Ward. The latter had already been called in by a certain Royal Duchess; his name was in everyone's mouth, and being barely forty, his fame would naturally increase, while Lullington's had been at its zenith twenty years before, and had gone on steadily waning ever since.

Moreover, the elder man knew this. He was in such a position he dared not risk making a professional mistake; he knew that more than once a second doctor had had to be called in to remedy his half-and-half measures; therefore he would hardly dare to oppose the rising physician from Harley-street.

"This is quite a surprise," he began lightly. "One doesn't often see you out at this hour!"

"I have come on a matter of life and death. Lullington, I must put some questions to you; if they seem a breach of professional etiquette forgive me, and answer them."

"My dear sir, I am entirely at your service."

"You have been called to the Grosvenor Hotel to see Miss Carew?"

"Certainly; I have attended that young lady since the beginning of the year."

"This gentleman is Miss Carew's affianced husband."

Lullington bowed, which Paul returned. "And he naturally wants to be assured of her condition. The people she is with are her sworn foes."

"Most worthy people."

"Can you keep a secret, Lullington?"

"Naturally; or I should not be a doctor."

"Then listen. Fifteen years ago these same worthy people killed Miss Carew's mother by repeated, though minute, doses of digitalis. I was a young man and unexperienced in those days, so I did not detect their crime until it was too late for exposure to do any good; but by the remorse I suffered from that fatal error I will do my utmost to protect the child from sharing the mother's fate."

Dr. Lullington stared.

"Really, my dear sir—"

"Let us understand each other. I have warned you plainly, if you disregard my words the guilt of murder will be on your soul."

The elderly physician shuddered.

"You have no proof—"

"Can you assure me Miss Carew's symptoms are not such as would be produced by the effects of digitalis?"

"No—but—"

"Can you declare her disease to be any known disorder such as we have both met dozens of times in our career?"

"No—but—"

"Can you recollect that these people gain fifty thousand pounds by the girl's death?—that they have separated her from lover and friends, and hurried her secretly from place to place? Lullington, can you think over these facts calmly, and tell me you don't suspect foul play?"

This shot had gone home at last.

"I will do my very best to help you—I will, indeed; but just remember the consequences to me if I bring a false charge, or one I cannot prove against these people! They would have me up for defamation of character in no time."

"They would not dare. Their guilty consciences would make cowards of them; but I don't want you to proffer any charge."

"What then?"

"Simply introduce a woman whom I will send you as Miss Carew's nurse."

"I suggested to-day it would be prudent to employ a nurse, but Mrs. Austin said she preferred to take charge of the invalid herself."

Ward smiled sardonically.

"Of course she does. If we would not have that poor girl's death upon our conscience, Lullington, you must introduce a nurse. Come, a great man like you has a right to be peremptory at times. Tell Mrs. Austin you'll throw up the case unless she consents to secure the nurse you will provide."

"But I am by no means sure a nurse could not be hoodwinked. If these people are as bad as you make out, they would not stand at much."

"Not the woman I speak of. She is a faithful servant of my own, and she stood by the death bed of Miss Carew's mother."

Lullington looked intensely bothered.

"I wish they had never sent for me; it's quite out of my usual routine."

"I daresay."

"I never had a case of attempted poisoning in the whole of my career—never!"

"They probably guessed as much when they consulted you. As it happens there is no precise treatment required. If we can once cut off the supply of poison, and guard against any more being administered, the victory is ours."

"It's a troublesome business."

"A Golden Destiny" is a powerful romance.

"When are you to see Miss Carew again?"

"At five this afternoon."

"Good! The woman I spoke of will accompany you."

"But—"

"Or else I take the matter into my own hands, and appeal to the police. I fancy the story of your refusal to take a little trouble for your patient's safety would enhance your reputation."

Dr. Lullington was vanquished.

"I shall leave here at ten minutes to five," he said, grandiloquently. "Will you see that the person you speak of does not keep me waiting?"

"I will."

Mark drove straight home, and went to seek his wife.

"Molly, I have come to demand your promised sacrifice," he said, cheerfully. "We have succeeded beyond my utmost hopes, and Tibbets must do the rest."

Mrs. Ward gave one sign of resignation, and then went to warn the pillar of the house. The good woman began to pack at once, and long before the time named by Dr. Lullington she and her belongings were standing in his hall.

"And it'll go hard with me if I don't save her," soliloquized the woman as she waited. "They killed her ma under my eyes, but I'm a deal wiser than I was then."

And meanwhile Ivy Carew lay in a state of stupor, quite unconscious of the friend hastening to her rescue.

CHAPTER XII.

Lady Fortescue was driven to a handsome house, and presently ushered into a drawing-room as beautifully furnished as the one at Southlands. Someone was lying on a sofa, drawn near to the open window; and when the servant had placed her a chair close to the couch she discovered that her correspondent was a little old lady, dressed in black satin, with the daintiest of white caps on her snowy hair, and eyes still bright in spite of age and infirmities.

"It was very good of you to come."

"I was glad to come," and Lady Fortescue took the wasted hand in hers. "Oh! madam if you knew the misery my husband suffers at the thought of these Fosters living at our home you would understand my anxiety."

"My dear," said the little old lady, "I understand it perfectly, but you may make your mind quite easy. There is no drop of your husband's blood in old Sandy's veins, and neither he nor his descendants can ever claim the lands of the Fortescues."

Lady Fortescue felt a thrill of glad relief, but she was anxious to hear more. Miss Beresford waited a moment, and then continued:—

"I must go back a long time, my dear—more than fifty years. We were not living here, but in Tasmania. My father was the greatest man in the place; he had made a mint of money, and I suppose he thought he could spend it better in a large place, so in a few years he moved here. My mother was dead. I had no brother, and my sister, and I were heiresses. We were young and—so they said—pretty, and Mary was two years my junior, and my father's favourite; a fine handsome girl, looking much older than I did, for I was always small and delicate. We saw a great many people, all there were in the colony; and my father made no secret that he should give each of his daughters twenty thousand pounds on her wedding-day provided he approved her choice, and that her husband consented to take the name of Beresford.

"There were many after us, but I never thought of but one: he was the model of all that was bright and handsome, the best rider, the boldest fencer in the colony, and his name was Walter Foster."

Lady Fortescue started.

"Not related to that dreadful old man?"

"His half brother. Walter's true name was Fortescue, but he deemed it too good for common use. He signed it on great occasions; for the rest he was content to use his stepfather's. You see, my dear, Alexander Foster's story has some germs of truth in it. Alexander Fortescue left a son, a son who was adopted by his stepfather. It is only when old Sandy, as people call him attempts to prove he is that son falsehood steps in—they were half-brothers. I never saw Sandy till Walter had left the colony. Perhaps he thinks I am in my dotage, and have forgotten things. He must surely think so, or he never would have dared to pass himself off as his step-brother while I lived."

"And Walter is dead?"

"I do not know."

"You seemed to speak so in the past?"

"I have not seen him for more than fifty years, my dear. It is half a century old, and yet I can't speak of it without pain; he was too brave and handsome; and I—I loved him so, and it was hard to give him up."

"But surely—"

"He loved me too, but he trusted pen and ink to tell me of his love. He had always assumed, from my diminutive childish appearance, I was the younger of the two sisters; and so not only did he direct his letter to 'Miss M. Beresford,' but he asked my father for his second daughter."

"How terrible!"

"Yes I can remember what I felt now, when Mary came into my room to tell me of his letter. She loved him, for she was so happy in his love. Ah, me! what could I do but let things take their course."

"But surely Walter would have righted the mistake?"

"You forget he had actually proposed to my sister; she showed him that she loved him; and I—I was always reserved, and hid my feelings in my own heart. I think he fancied I did not care, and he would do better as the husband of the woman who cared for him than as her sister's rejected suitor."

"And you gave him up."

"I thought it best, dear, and I hoped they would be happy; but Mary had a strangely jealous temper. Whether he ever told her the truth, or if she only suspected it, I don't know; but she found out enough to make her hate the sight of me. We had one last interview—Walter and I. He told me what I knew—that I had been his choice—and I urged him for Mary's sake to take her away. I could not bear to embitter their happiness. My dear, they sailed for England, and six months later my sister died at the birth of her first-born son."

Lady Fortescue started. A strange idea had seized her.

"And he would be called Beresford?"

"Yes. He was christened Guy after my father; but in spite of the change of name it is to the Beresfords your husband must go to seek his heir."

"We know one Beresford. He is all we could desire, and is engaged to my own niece."

"Beresford is not an uncommon name."

"But this young man has no relations in England, and his grandfather came from Sydney. We took to him at first sight, and my husband has never been able to determine of whom he reminds him. Oh! Miss

Beresford, don't you think he may be Walter Fortescue's grandson, and Sir John's heir?"

The old lady looked delighted.

"It seems too good to be true. You see, my dear, we never heard of Walter after my sister's death. I lost my father soon after that, and I could not write to my old lover, for Mary's grave was an ever-present barrier between us."

"And you never married?"

"I could not. I had given my love once and for always. Lady Fortescue, if that man is Walter's grandson, do you think he would come and see me before I die?"

"I am sure he would."

"And now," said Miss Beresford, "you will have no difficulty in settling Sandy Foster's claims. Tell him you have seen me, and I don't think he will attempt to persist in his falsehood."

Lady Fortescue took leave of her new friend with great cordiality. She found Giles Brandon waiting to take her home.

"What do you think of Miss Beresford?"

"I can't think; she is too lovely."

"A beautiful soul in a beautiful body."

My wife was one of her godchildren, and I have known her ever since I came out. Lady Fortescue, I should not be surprised if your niece's fiancé were really and truly your husband's heir. Miss Beresford has told me all you have just heard, and I fancy that some day—I pray for your sake it may be far distant—your niece will be Lady Fortescue of Southlands."

Sir John was delighted. Even the fact that the failure of the Delonda mines was in all the papers, that George White's name was held up to public execration, and that the Baronet's own ten thousand pounds were lost for ever, could not lessen his satisfaction. After the sight of Old Sandy, the "Red Boot," and Maria Anne, it was positive bliss to think that these three had nothing to do with the fortunes of the Fortescues.

A short, but emphatic, note from Miss Beresford, a prompt, but not pleasant, call from her lawyer, threatening Sandy with trial for passing himself off as her brother-in-law, and thus attempting to defraud that gentleman of his lawful inheritance—these severe measures reduced the whole Foster family to abject submission, and induced them to sue humbly for terms of peace.

They came off far better than they expected. Sir John could not forget that if no blood relations of his own they were yet the direct descendants of the woman his uncle had married.

He was, therefore, disposed to lend them a helping hand, so he settled an annuity of a hundred a year on "old Sandy," and advanced the capital requisite to start John and Maria Anne in a business so far above the celebrated "Red Boot" that it was to be hoped in time the couple might enjoy comparative prosperity, and even launch their many olive branches successfully in life.

It was a sad parting between Lady Fortescue and Miss Beresford. The one could not forget whose voice had first raised the black veil of despondency that hung over her; the other, seeing Sir John's devotion to his wife, thought of Walter Fortescue, whom the Baronet much resembled, and gave a sigh to the romance of her youth.

But Sir John's first step on reaching England would be to prove Paul Beresford's identity with the grandson of the Walter who had been so loved and mourned; and then he promised Mona to send Paul and his young wife to the Antipodes for her to have a glimpse of them, so that was something for the lonely woman to look forward to

and make her cheerful even as she said good-bye to the kindly pair whose faces she knew full well she should see on earth no more.

There was a warm farewell to Giles Brandon, and much gratitude for his kindness; and then, on the eighth of March, just a week after she received Miss Beresford's note, Lady Fortescue and her husband embarked for their native land.

"We are due late in April," said Sir John as they passed on deck. "We shall have been away five months. On the whole, Lucy, they have been tolerably pleasant ones."

But would they have said so—would Sir John have looked so contented, and his wife so serenely happy—had they known what events had been transpiring in England during their absence? Only one letter had been received from Ivy—that already referred to; and though its tone was not bright, Lady Fortescue never dreamed for a moment of the bitter heartache, the fearful peril, in store for her darling.

CHAPTER XIII. AND LAST.

A CONSIDERABLE surprise awaited Dr. Lullington when he reached the Grosvenor Hotel—Mrs. Tibbet, and her carpet bag in her wake! Mrs. Austin had actually left.

Mary, the maid, who had been left to explain matters to the doctor, declared poor Miss Carew had seemed so disturbed at the noise and bustle of the hotel that her mistress had gone out and hired a small furnished house in the immediate neighbourhood. Two servants were kept by the owner; and, in Mrs. Austin's opinion, the quiet and privacy gained amply compensated for any risk incurred by the removal.

Dr. Lullington did not think so when, having obtained the address from Mary, he drove to the small, ill-ventilated house, and found Ivy Carew tossing restlessly to and fro upon the bed, her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright with fever-light—every symptom of her case far worse than when he had seen her in the morning.

"It was a most imprudent step, madam," he said, gravely, to Mrs. Austin when she followed him to the drawing-room, "and I will not be answerable for the consequences."

"I assure you, Dr. Lullington—"

"I am certain you meant well," interrupted the physician; "but the step proves your inexperience in the care of the sick. You really must allow me to send in a nurse."

"The dear child hates strangers."

"She is well-nigh unconscious, and a nurse she must have if she is to recover."

"I promised to attend on her myself. I don't know, really, how I can give her up to a hireling's hands."

"Madam," said Dr. Lullington, emphatically (and he did so very authoritative when he chose), "you have called me into this case. Suffer me to find a proper person to nurse my patient, or I withdraw from it entirely. There are more lives lost through want of care than we can save with all our skill. You can, of course, employ another doctor, but I fancy any man worth his salt would know the necessity of the case as well as I do."

Mrs. Austin looked at him anxiously.

"What do you imagine her disease to be, Dr. Lullington? You have never given it a name, I think."

"Low fever," was the prompt reply; "and a very bad attack."

Clearly he had no suspicions. It was better, surely, to retain such a convenient doctor, even if doing so entailed the

presence of a nurse. Some nurses were fond of a little hot grog.

Mrs. Austin saw her way pretty clearly to work in her brother's service, even if a nurse attended Ivy.

"Of course, Dr. Lullington, your opinion must supersede mine, and a nurse be found. I confess I have not an idea where to look for one!"

"I knew of an excellent person, and took the precaution to engage her on my way. Mrs. Tibbet is now waiting in my brougham."

She was called in and introduced to Mrs. Austin. The great lady had a vague idea there was something strangely familiar about the kind, homely face.

As for Tibbettie, she gave one look at Mrs. Austin's little finger, and knew she had found the "Jane" of other days, but she never betrayed any sign of recognition. She curtsied humbly, and asked to be shown to her patient.

"A nice, civil-spoken woman," observed Mrs. Austin, as she withdrew.

"One in a thousand my fellow-practitioners tell me."

When Ivy came to herself it was night time, and someone was watching by her in a quiet grey dress and plain white cap. The girl's heavy eyes looked inquiringly on the face. It was strange to her.

"Are you better, my dear?"

"I think so—only so weak. I feel just sinking through the floor."

There was wine on a little table and beef-tea heating over a spirit lamp, but Mrs. Tibbet had reasons of her own for mistrusting both. From her carpet bag she took a tin of soup, opened it deftly, and set it on the hob to warm, then she fed Ivy with spoonfuls as though she had been a baby.

"I feel better. Are you a nurse?"

"I'm one that loved your mother, my dear young lady. I was with her in her last illness, and for her sake I have come to nurse her child."

"I don't want to get well," murmured Ivy. "I'd rather go to mother. I am so tired."

She was quite herself composed and clear-headed Tibbettie knew perfectly nothing ailed her but great weakness.

"You're not going to die yet, Miss Ivy! Why, what would that fine young gentlemen do without you? It's but an hour before I came here Mr. Beresford was in my room, and he put out his hand to say good-bye to me as if I'd been a lady born, and begged me with the tears in his eyes, to give you his dearest love."

"Poor Paul!"

"Aye, he's poor enough!" said Tibbettie, who had been taken fully into confidence.

"First sent off to Scotland at a moment's notice, and then kept there against his will for weeks and weeks, and when he does get back just finds his lady-love's been hidden away from him!"

"I think he loved me!"

Tibbettie altered the tense to the present. "He loves you better than ought else, my dear, though I can't say, Miss Ivy, you've given him much cause!"

Ivy's eyes filled.

"It seemed kinder not to see him. Think of the pain of parting!"

"But, my dear! why part? In a few months your uncle and aunt 'll be back, and then there 'll be a wedding!"

"Oh, hush! hush! Don't you know it was all a mistake! His wife is alive!"

"My dear," said Tibbettie, lowering her voice to a whisper, "you are ill, but not too ill to understand what I say. Mr. Beresford has no wife—never wished for one till he saw you. Two very cruel people got you in their power, Missie, and

they knew they could not hurt you while Mr. Beresford was by, so they sent him to Scotland, and then they set to work to try and part you!"

Ivy started up in bed.

"Oh, nurse," she cried, "do you mean it? Is it really true?"

"It's true that Paul Beresford's your faithful lover, Missie."

"But Mr. White!"

Tibbettie hesitated.

"Missie, you mustn't be frightened. I'm here, and I promise you I'll let no one hurt you; but you've been in sore peril, my dear, and if ever there was a villain in the world it's the man you call George White!"

"He has been so kind to me!"

Tibbettie dared not tell the part he had played on her mother's death, nor even hint at his attempt on Ivy's own life; she went on another tack.

"Mr. White will move Heaven and earth to part you from your lover, my dear! He's made the cruellest charges against Mr. Beresford."

"I used to dislike him very much, but lately I have trusted him. He has been so kind; and, nurse, he knew mamma."

"Yes, he knew her."

"You say you were with her in her last illness. Won't you tell me about her?"

"There was one prayer ever on her lips, Miss Ivy, which I think she uttered with her last breath. She had two cruel enemies. For herself she did not bear them malice, but she never ceased to pray her child might not fall into their cruel hands. It's fifteen years turned, Miss Ivy, but you see I've never forgotten it! and so, when I heard these two enemies had got possession of the child, I thought for the mother's sake I'd try to save her."

Ivy had finished the soup by this time. She sat up in bed, the fever had gone down now; she looked herself, only very wan and wistful.

"I think you are right," she whispered; "first thoughts are right sometimes, and I used to fear both Mr. White and his sister."

"You had cause."

"But I must stay with them."

"Not unless you like."

"Uncle and aunt placed me in their care, and somehow I fancy they would not let me go."

"Hush!"

Tibbettie's quick ear had detected an approaching footstep, muffled as it was. She sank back in her elbow chair, and seemed fast asleep. Ivy closed her eyes, marvelling what could be going to happen; then she turned round, with her back to the door, so that she could, if necessary, peep at the new-comer, herself unseen.

It was Mrs. Austin! No doubt her anxiety about Ivy would not let her rest. The girl felt a pang of remorse as she reflected how little she deserved such affection—she who had allowed a stranger to disparage her kind hostess to her.

Mrs. Austin went up to the nurse and shook her gently, but Tibbettie never stirred, she seemed wrapt in healthful slumber; then the intruder advanced to the bed and glanced at Ivy.

To her life's end Miss Carew never forgot that moment; her whole being seemed terror-stricken. Apparently satisfied that both nurse and invalid were sleeping, Mrs. Austin took a folded paper from her pocket, and put a tiny pinch of some dark floury substance into the beef-tea warming on the spirit lamp, and a similar one into a glass of lemonade on the table; and then she departed, with the same silken tread, and as she vanished from the room Tibbettie and Ivy looked at each other.

"What does it mean?"

"It means, my dear, Mrs. Austin would like to help you to Heaven very soon, but that Mr. Beresford wants you to stay down here."

As she spoke, Tibbettie poured away both lemonade and beef-tea, washing the basin and glass carefully. Ivy looked at her wonderingly.

"Did she mean to kill me?"

"I am afraid so."

"But why?"

"Ah! Miss Ivy, I fancy this has been going on a long time; but, never mind, I'm with you now, and if I let you run a risk of being starved, you shall not eat or drink anything she has so much as touched."

Ivy looked bewildered.

"I never injured her."

"She didn't wait for that."

"And Aunt Lucy mayn't be home till May!—This is only February. Nurse how can I stay here all that time, knowing what I do now?"

"You must go away to-morrow, or the next day."

"But how—where?"

"Leave that to me," said the pillar of Mary Ward's nursery; "and now my dear, you'd better try and go to sleep."

Tibbettie wrote a long letter the next day, and got one of the servants to post it. Even had Mrs. Austin read the address she would not have interfered, for nurse directed the letter to herself. She knew quite well the name of Ward might arouse suspicion, but "Mary Tibbet, 109 Harley-street," was quite harmless, and Dr. Ward, forewarned, would know the letter was for him.

He opened it in Paul Beresford's presence, for it really concerned that gentleman, and Paul's face grew brighter than it had been for weeks.

"Much worse," was Dr. Lullington's verdict when he had interviewed Tibbettie, and Mrs. Austin had pursued him with inquiries. "I really fear, my dear lady, your young friend will escape from us, after all."

Mrs. Austin, remembering last night's episodes, had no right to feel surprised, but she manifested great grief.

"Sweet girl! how sad. Can nothing more be done, doctor?"

"Nothing in the world more than has been done. I would suggest a second opinion, but I fear it would be useless."

"Quite so. I assure you we have every confidence in you, doctor."

He drove away rubbing his hands.

"That Marcus Ward is a famous fellow. I don't think there's another man in a hundred would have thought of such a plan."

The next night Mrs. Austin's visit was repeated, and it seemed to Tibbettie's keen eyes that the pinch of brownish powder was larger than the time before.

"How is Miss Carew?"

This was in the morning at half-past nine. Mrs. Austin had come down rather late, and had not stopped to make her usual visit of inquiry at the door of the sick room.

"Please, ma'am," said Mary, sadly, for the pretty maid liked Ivy, "she's gone."

"Gone!" and Mrs. Austin's surprise was a famous piece of acting. "Oh, Mary, surely not dead!"

"It was at five o'clock this morning, ma'am, and so sudden; the nurse would not go for you. She was standing at the door crying when the servants came down."

"I must telegraph for your master."

"Nurse wanted to know if you'd like to see her, poor dear young lady, please ma'am, or would you wait until Dr. Lullington comes?"

"Oh, I'll wait, Mary. I couldn't go up there alone, it would upset me dreadfully, and there'll be orders to give and a lot of

things to see to. It would never do for me to be knocked up."

"Nurse thought she had better step round to the doctor's, ma'am, and tell him how it was. She's gone there now."

Mrs. Austin was usually termed a strong-minded woman, but no earthly powers would have taken her upstairs. She sat in the drawing-room in a state of subdued excitement waiting for her brother, who she knew was in the city, and wondering why Dr. Lullington was so dilatory.

After all, Mr. White came first. He took Mrs. Austin in his arms and kissed her as he had not done for years. Tibbettie was right when she asserted these two were not brother and sister, neither were they husband and wife. They had been lovers once, betrayer and betrayed; but now, for many years, they had been simply comrades, boon companions linked together against the world.

"You have managed splendidly; when I heard of the nurse I was in despair."

"She turned out to be a very sleepy person."

"And Lullington has no suspicion?"

"Not one."

"I suppose he will be here soon?"

"I expected him an hour ago. You can do nothing until you get the certificate."

"Nothing. I wish he would be quick. Only think of it, Jenny! Ten thousand a year, and Carew—a lovely estate! We shall be in luck's way."

The doctor's brougham stopping at the door, Dr. Lullington and another gentleman alighting were ushered into the drawing-room.

"A sad occasion," said George White, gravely. "Ah! doctor, when we first consulted you in January we did not think we were so soon to lose the dear child!"

"I suppose not," said Dr. Lullington. "Mr. White, I am rather in a hurry this morning, so I will make my visit a short one; here is the certificate."

"Oh!" George White seized on the paper, "But is it usual? Wouldn't you rather go upstairs?"

"For what purpose?"

"To view it—the body."

Dr. Lullington's companion interposed,—

"There is no body upstairs."

"Sir!"

"Fifteen years ago," went on the stranger, coldly, "you and I were well acquainted, sir, but you were called George Gresham in those days. I was a young man, and too inexperienced to cope with you, and so your wife was done to death under my eyes, but I have done my best to atone for that mistake by saving her daughter."

George White, *alias* Gresham, stared.

"Who and what are you, sir? You shall answer to me for these lies!"

"I am the doctor called to your wife in her last illness, and I am also (I say this with pride) the designer of the scheme by which Miss Carew has escaped from sharing her mother's terrible fate."

"Miss Carew is dead."

"Have you seen her corpse?"

White turned on his accomplice with a fearful oath,—

"Woman, have you lied to me?"

"They told me she was 'gone'; they said it was at five o'clock this morning, and, of course, I believed them."

"The statement was quite true," said Dr. Lullington; "Miss Carew left you this morning at a very early hour. My brougham was waiting to take her to Harley-street, where her godfather and my worthy colleague here (turning to Ward) expected her. Mr. Beresford was also Dr. Ward's guest, and after disposing of all the lying charges you had brought against him, he

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suggested to Miss Carew that as, until her uncle's return you might claim some right over her as her guardian, she should give him a nearer and dearer title. Mrs. Ward had fully expected a consent. All the arrangements had been made at a neighbouring church, and when I reached the edifice at nine (by special request) the ceremony at once begun, and it was as complete and binding as though the service had been read by a bishop, and eight noble damsels attended the bride. Thus you see, sir, Miss Carew has ceased to exist, and Mrs. Beresford is with her husband en route for the Isle of Wight. The certificate I had the pleasure of handing you was not of her death, but of her marriage."

George White and the woman who had been called his sister could not brazen out the charges brought against them. Marcus Ward and Mrs. Tibbet were too much for the guilty pair; and after an hour's thought they were thankful to accept the terms offered by their foes, viz., that no notice should be taken of their crimes, either attempted or committed, provided they at once left England and never again obtruded themselves on the notice of Ivy or her friends.

The title of "millionaire" had never been a true one, and of late all George White had touched seemed to fail. He carried with him when he fled south with Jenny only a thousand pounds.

An execution was at once put into the house at Coningsby-street, and it was rumoured the debts were more than ten times heavier than the assets.

Fear of their guilty deeds being punished induced the evil pair to keep their promise, and thus far they have never been seen in England, though they have often been heard of at Monaco and similar haunts.

As for Paul and Ivy their reunion was perfect and complete. It seemed to our heroine at first she could never be forgiven for having doubted her lover; but he

whispered to her she could *proveshp* trusted him now by giving herself to him for all time.

They were married on a Saturday morning, just a week and a day after Paul returned from Scotland to find his darling missing. And I suppose theirs was the strangest wedding ever known, for the bride had just risen from a sick bed, and the only spectator of her own sex was a stranger, whom she met that day for the first time.

They spent a very halcyon time in the Isle of Wight, and when the Easter holidays came, and Ivy was a wife of two months' standing Ivy welcomed quite a crowd of guests. Dr. Ward and his winsome wife, Mr. Ronald Thorne, who looked on himself as Ivy's preserver, good John Milton, and an older friend than any, the Rev. Hugh Ainslie.

The Carew party had hardly broken up when news came that Sir John and Lady Fortescue were at Plymouth. Ivy felt considerably embarrassed. Her aunt's letter was full of her forthcoming wedding and plans for an elaborate trousseau.

"I feel like an arch deceiver," said the young wife, nestling her pretty head on her husband's shoulder. "What will they say when they know all; and how can we tell them?"

After all, it was not nearly so difficult as they had imagined. Hugh Ainslie, who was always ready to do awkward things for his friends, went down to Plymouth, and broke the news to the Fortescues.

When they heard of their darling's peril they were not likely to be hard on the man who had delivered her; and so, though Lady Fortescue sighed for the glories of the grand wedding which she could not now arrange, she spoke nothing but the tenderest congratulations to her niece.

When Sir John came to talk to Paul of Mona Beresford's story he could say nothing but that his grandfather had been called Walter, and his own father had often told him there was just a remote chance he might come in for an English estate; but Mr. Griffiths was called in to the consultation, and he had in his possession all the proofs necessary to identify Paul as the great-grandson of that Alexander who sailed for Australia so many years before.

So Sir John's trouble was removed. He had found his heir; and, moreover, the heir was just such a young man as he would have chosen, and his wife was worthy one day to bear her aunt's title.

But as soon as ever the question of Paul's descent was settled another arose. Should Mrs. Beresford be presented at Court that season? Ivy herself refused; it was now June, and she preferred to wait till next year, which would enable them to gratify Mona Beresford's desire, and pay her a brief visit before she went to her last home.

Ivy intended to stay at most a month, but when they reached Sydney, in August, there were certain family reasons which induced them to prolong their stay. They made Aunt Mona's house their home, and there, about Christmas time, the dear old lady had the pleasure of welcoming another Walter Beresford, Ivy's firstborn child.

Ivy said good-bye to the dear old lady and kindly Giles Brandon, and returned to England in time for Ivy to be presented at the second drawing-room of the season; but though each spring Mr. and Mrs. Beresford spend two or three months in London, they are by no means fashion's votaries. They much prefer a quiet home-like life at their own beautiful seat, Carew, or at Meadow View, which Sir John has made over to them,

And perhaps at Meadow View they are happiest of all. It was here where they first met, and after five years of married life these two are lovers yet.

"A perfect marriage!" says Molly Ward approvingly to her husband; and then, with a fond smile, "but not so perfect as ours."

That Ivy would certainly deny. She and Mrs. Ward are great friends, and Tibbettie has accompanied her nurselings so often to Mrs. Beresford's that Ivy's children have grown to look on her almost as a property of their own.

Ivy's children? Yes, it is necessary to use the plural number now, for there are four small doddlers in the Meadow View gardens. Walter, the eldest, Sir John's darling, and the future baronet; Mona, a dark-eyed child, whose beauty somehow recalls that of her Australian godmother, whose heiress she will surely be; an innate coquette even at three years old, and able to turn a certain tall athletic young gentleman, whose name is Thorne, as people phrase it, "round her little finger."

Ronald is Mr. Ainslie's curate now, and so the small Mona often sees her slave. As for the two youngest children they are mere babies—Paul, who will some day be master of Carew, and a mite of a creature in long clothes, who was called Helen at the special request of Mr. Ainslie.

Thus the dark clouds have rolled away from our heroine's path, though Paul still shudders when he recalls the time of Ivy's Peril; for however many years pass over their heads, even when they have grown old together, his wife will ever be Beresford's Love.

[THE END.]

IS IT DONE?

It is done! In the fire's fitful flashes

The last line is withered and curled;

In a tiny white heap of dead ashes

Lie buried the hopes of the world.

There were mad, foolish vows in each letter—

It is well they have shrivelled and burned,

And the ring! oh, the ring was a fetter;

It was better removed and returned.

But ah! is it done? In the embers,

Where letters and tokens were cast,

Have you burned up the heart that remembers,

And treasures its beautiful past?

Do you think in this swift, reckless fashion

To ruthlessly burn and destroy

The months that were freighted with passion,

The dreams that were drunken with joy.

Can you burn up the rapture of kisses

That flashed from the lips of the soul?

Or the heart that grows sick for lost

blisses

In spite of its strength of control?

Have you burned up the touch of warm

fingers

That thrilled through each pulse and each

vein,

Or the sound of a voice that still lingers

And hurts with an haunting refrain?

Is it done? Is the life drama ended?

You have put all the lights out, and

yet,

Though the curtain, rang down, has descended,

Can the actors go home and forget?

Ah, no! They will turn in their sleeping

With a strange, restless pain in their

hearts,

And in darkness and anguish and weeping

Will dream they are playing their parts.

Facetiæ.

MRS. CRAWFORD: "My husband has become very hard to please." Mrs. Crabshaw: "It is a good thing for you, my dear, that he was not always that way."

SILICUS: "It is a beautiful thing to see a young girl growing into womanhood." CYNICUS: "That's right. So many of them seem to want to grow into manhood."

HIS ONLY CHANCE.—"Your son has a very robust appetite." "Yes, I'm ashamed of him. He always overeats when we have company." "Then's the only chance I ever git," said the terrible infant.

LOST PATIENCE.—"We cannot consider your story seriously," wrote an editor to an author. "You have killed your hero in the middle of it." To which the author replied: "I killed him because he made me tired!"

"You ought to make some allowance for her," observed the girl in the fur jacket. "She is a woman with a past." "I know it," returned the girl in the golf cape, "but such an ungrammatical past! She says, 'I done!'"

SPENDALL: "I gave you that sovereign as a friendly tip; why do you hand fifteen shillings back?" Waiter: "I likes to keep everything on a business basis, sah. Gents wot's so very friendly w'en dey has money is apt to come 'round tryin' to borror w'en dey gets broke."

ONE of Judge Howland's stories had to do with the old Maine farmer who had been married four times. Shortly after the death of his fourth wife, a neighbour stopped him and said—"Mornin', Cyrus. How's the wife this mornin'?" "Wall, to tell ye the truth," replied Cyrus, "I'm kinder out of wives just now."

SHE: "Isn't it lovely? Papa consents?" He: "Does he, really?" She: "Yes. He wanted to know who you were, and I told him you were tape-clerk at Scrimp & Co.'s, and he seemed very pleased." He: "I am delighted." She: "Yes, and he said we could be married just as soon as you were taken into the firm."

"A MAN told me the other day I looked just like his sister," mused the meditative maiden. "And didn't you?" asked the matter-of-fact girl. "I don't know about that," went on the muser: "I only know that I've been told a good many things by men, but this was the first time I'd heard I was like a sister."

"She isn't a very expert stenographer," said one young woman, "and yet the political orator for whom she takes dictation has raised her salary three times this year." "Yes," answered the other. "She isn't expert, but she is clever. She told me about it. She always giggles out loud when she comes to any portion of a speech that he obviously intends to be funny."

A LADYLIKE DESCENT.—"Frances," said the little girl's mamma, who was entertaining callers in the parlour, "you came downstairs so noisily that you could be heard all over the house. You know how to do it better than that. Now, go back and come down the stairs like a lady." Frances retired, and, after the lapse of a few minutes, re-entered the parlour. "Did you hear me come downstairs this time, mamma?" "No, dear; I am glad you came down quietly. Now, don't let me ever have to tell you again not to come down noisily, for I see that you can come down quietly if you will. Now, tell these ladies how you managed to come down like a lady the second time, while the first time you made so much noise." "The last time I slid down the banisters," explained Frances.

Gleanings

THE Kit Cat Club was an association of literary men, founded in London in 1700.

A CANDLE which burns two grains of spermaceti a minute is taken as the unit of candle power in estimating the brilliancy of various lights.

It is said that the bridal veil originated in the Anglo-Saxon custom of performing the nuptial ceremony under a square piece of cloth, held at each corner by a tall man over the bridegroom and the bride, to conceal the blushes of the latter. At the marriage of a widow it was dispensed with.

No language was ever understood by so many men as the Chinese; no living language can claim such antiquity; none is so purely its own and so unlike every other. It is the oldest language now spoken, and, excepting the Hebrew, it is, perhaps, the most ancient written language ever used by man.

THE Mexican senoritas are borne to the grave on open biers, whereon they lie attired in all the finery that was the delight of their young hearts while living. There they lie, with flowers heaped around them; their skirts fringed with costly lace, and the delicate ankles and feet showing yet more delicate in silk hose and Cinderella slippers.

THE Islanders of the Pacific Ocean use flutes made of bamboo, about a foot long, held like our German flutes, but blown through the nose. Their drum, the Adam of all musical instruments, is a hollow block of wood, of a cylindrical form, solid at one end and covered at the other with shark's skin; for want of drum-sticks they beat time upon it with their hands.

HOMER refers to the Centaurs as savages or monsters covered with hair. They are in reality supposed to have been a wild tribe of Thessaly, who first discovered the art of taming and riding wild horses. The more ancient sculptures represent them as persons who stood by horses to hold them, and in process of time, by poetical or picturesque license, they came to be represented as half men and half horses.

ALABASTER is so called from Alabastron, the name of a small town in Upper Egypt, near which the stone was very abundant. There are two kinds of alabaster, one a white semi-transparent sulphate of lime, and the other a compact crystalline carbonate of lime. The former is the real alabaster, and is so soft that it may be scratched with the nail, while the latter is quite hard, and effervesces in acid.

CLOCK-MAKERS were first introduced into England in 1368, when Edward III. granted a license for three artists to come over from Delft, in Holland, and practice their occupation in this country. The oldest English clock of note is in the turret of the Royal Palace, Hampton, constructed in the year 1540, which was in the reign of Henry VIII., by a maker whose initials are N. O. In the time of Queen Elizabeth, clocks were denominated orloges, or horloges.

THE ballet owes its origin to France. So early as 1581 a ballet was produced in that country to celebrate the marriage of the Duc de Joyeuse, which cost 3,600,000 francs. The dancers, male and female, were petted to the full. A cloud from the theatrical heavens having fallen upon the beautiful arm of Mademoiselle Guimard, as she was dancing the "Les Fetes de l'Hymen et de l'Amour," and broken it, a mass was said in the church of Notre Dame for the injured limb.

FOR many years the "ducking stool" was a form of punishment legally authorized in this country for the punishment of scolding wives. It consisted of a chair, in which the woman was securely fastened, her arms being drawn backward and a bar placed across her back and inside her elbows, with another bar to hold her upright. In this uncomfortable position she was then securely tied with strong cords. The chair was fastened to a long beam, elevated on a wooden horse, and the persons appointed to conduct the punishment, by raising their end of the beam, caused the culprit to be plunged bodily into the water. By pulling down their end of the beam with a chain, she was once more brought to the surface, the ducking being repeated according to the greatness of her offence. The ducking stool became obsolete at the close of the eighteenth century.

"HALCYON days" originally referred to the seven days preceding and the seven days succeeding the shortest day in the year. They were so designated from a superstition that calm weather always prevailed at this time, which was erroneously thought to be the brooding period of the halcyon or kingfisher. The nest was supposed to float on the sea; therefore the bird was regarded as a harbinger of calm weather, security and peace. The name comes from Aleyone, or Halcyone, the daughter of Aeolus. Aleyone was the wife of Ceyx, who was drowned as he was going to consult the oracle. On finding his body on the shore, she threw herself into the sea. To reward their mutual affection, the gods changed them into halcyons, and decreed that the sea should become quiet while these birds built their nest upon it. The modern meaning of "halcyon days" is a period of tranquility and peace.

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Society

THE Queen is still a little loth to surround herself with all the ceremonies attendant on her new condition, and prefers to summon her ladies when she is in need of their services, rather than have them take up their duties in rotation, as was the previous custom; but she takes a very special and kindly interest in her twin maids-of-honour, Miss Violot and Miss Dorothy Vivian. She is arranging that they shall always be in waiting at the same time, and go about together as much as possible. It is her wish also that they should always be dressed alike—which latter arrangement may not be very much to their taste!

PRINCESS CHARLES of Denmark is very fond of curios of all sorts, and has already amassed a fair collection, one of her treasures being a wonderful belt of flexible silver, which she had studded with some splendid unset rubies and sapphires given her as a wedding gift by her grandmother, Queen Victoria. This is a unique as well as a valuable jewel, and suits admirably the Princess's slender waist. Anything in the shape of ivory the Princess is particularly fond of, and her father and uncle have from time to time given her quite a number of spoils of their own guns in the shape of elephants and rhinoceros tusks and tiger claws. The teeth of a shark which her brother, Prince George, helped to kill when he was a midshipman, are also among her many valuables, many of which are set in gold or silver, while each has its own history attached.

EVERYBODY may not know that in Royal households it is not the custom to relight a candle. For however short a time it has been burning, if once extinguished, it is never used again—at least not in the precincts of the palace. Another quaint monarchical custom is that there are always two sets of servants, to ensure better service. The one set goes on duty for three weeks, and when that time has expired another set will take their place, so that in the Sovereign's palace there is always one complete retinue at work while their duplicates are resting until their three weeks of service comes round again.

SOME surprise was caused by the announcement that the King had granted the use of White Lodge, Richmond Park, to Mrs. Hartmann. Mrs. Hartmann, though a widow of advanced years, has long been a close personal friend of the King, and his frequent hostess in Berkeley-square. It was widely assumed that the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall would take possession of the house in which the Duchess was born and bred. But though the Duchess loves the White House, the Duke looks coldly upon it. Moreover, a princely income is necessary for its maintenance. Mrs. Hartmann, fortunately, does not lack the necessary means.

THE King has sent as a memento a fine bracelet to his mother's old friend and Mistress of the Robes, Elizabeth, Duchess of Wellington. Fifty years ago the Duchess, then Marchioness of Douro, filled a large place in English high life. She was a woman of conspicuous beauty, and the idea generally prevailed that she was not well treated by her decidedly peculiar husband, whilst, on the other hand, she received the most fatherly attention from the great Duke, in whose company she often appeared in public, and who, it was averred, thus made up for the neglect he in turn had shown to his own wife. There was published about that time an engraving, still occasionally to be seen in print shops, of the Duke and his daughter-in-law on horseback on the field of Waterloo, his Grace acting as cicerone and describing the memorable day.

Statistics

St. Peter's, at Rome, will accommodate 54,000 persons, Milan Cathedral, 37,000 and St. Paul's Cathedral, London, 25,000 persons.

In the English language there are about 260,000 words. Next comes German, with 80,000; Italian, 75,000; French, 30,000; the Turkish language, 22,000; while the Spanish tongue has only about 20,000 words.

THE population of Chinese cities, other than Canton, Peking, and Shanghai, cannot be estimated, because reports respecting them are so utterly untrustworthy. There are forty or more Chinese cities whose inhabitants are numbered by rumour at 200,000 to 1,000,000. But no official censuses have ever been taken; and, setting aside consideration of the Oriental tendency to exaggeration, there is reason to believe that the estimates of population in many instances cover districts of country bearing the same name as the cities instead of separate municipalities.

Gems

AN angry person in an argument resembles a cripple in a foot race,

In prayer it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart.

DIFFICULTY is a nurse of greatness—a harsh nurse, who rocks her foster children roughly, but rocks them into strength and athletic proportions.

CALL it happiness or call it blessedness, the life whose end is righteousness is a life which satisfies, and which one is not willing but glad to live; its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace.

Household - - - - Treasures

STUFFED EGGS.—Cut some hard boiled eggs in halves, mix each yolk with a teaspoonful of grated cheese and small piece of butter. Season with salt, cayenne, and a grating of nutmeg. Refill the whites and serve on a bed of cress.

SIMPLE LAYER CAKE.—Beat a quarter of a cupful of butter with the yolks of two eggs until light; add gradually a cupful and a half of granulated sugar. Measure two and a half cupfuls of pastry flour, and sift with two teaspoonfuls of baking powder. Measure a cupful of water. Beat the whites of the two eggs to a stiff froth; add the water and flour gradually until you have about half added; then begin to add the whites of the eggs, and continue with the flour and water. After the ingredients are all mixed beat thoroughly for about five minutes. Bake in three layers.

APPLE water is a refreshing drink for an invalid. It can be made with either baked or raw apples, the former to be preferred when haste is wished, that is, if the apples are baked and in readiness. They should be sour, and when cooked should be immersed in boiling water to cover them. Let stand until cool, strain and sweeten to taste. For that made from raw apples, three or four juicy sour apples of fine flavor should be pared and sliced. Pour over two cupfuls of boiling water and let stand three hours. Strain, sweeten and add a small piece of ice. A pleasant flavor is added if the rind of a lemon is mixed with the slices of apple.

Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

AMOS.—When piano keys have become discolored, wet a cloth with cologne, dip into a little finely-powdered whiting and rub the keys one at a time; then polish with an old silk handkerchief.

BROWNIE.—To remove grease spots from wall-paper, hold over the stain a piece of clean blotting paper and press it with a flat-iron. The heat causes the grease to be absorbed by the blotting paper.

KATE.—The egg shampoo, for dandruff, is thus prepared: Yolk of one egg, one pint of hot rain water, one ounce of spirit of rosemary; beat the mixture up thoroughly and use it warm, rubbing it well into the scalp. Rinse thoroughly in several waters.

ELEANOR.—The bride's father usually pays for the flowers and carriages used at the wedding. The bridegroom may, however, provide the bouquets if he chooses; he also pays for the carriage that takes the bride and bridegroom from the church or house to the station.

STANDISH.—To remove warts, dissolve in about a pint of water as much common washing soda as the water will take up; wash the warts with this for a minute or two, and let them dry without wiping. Keep the water in a bottle, and repeat the washing often, and it will take away the largest warts.

OSWEGO.—To salt almonds, shell them, cover with boiling water, let them stand for a moment, rub off the brown skin. Then put them into a baking pan in the oven until they are thoroughly dry. To each half pound pour over a teaspoonful of olive oil. Shake until they are a golden brown. Take from the oven, dredge thickly with very fine salt and turn out immediately to cool.

AN ADMIRER.—Napoleon II. was the son of Napoleon I. and Marie Louise. At his birth he was created King of Rome, and on his father's abdication an attempt was made to proclaim him Emperor, but it was soon abandoned. He was brought up at the court of his grandfather, Francis of Austria. He died at the age of twenty-one. His memory is cherished by the Bonaparte party under the style of Napoleon II.

BASHFUL.—It is very evident that your awkwardness while in the company of ladies results from your extraordinary bashfulness. Some people are more or less bashful all their lives, but in the majority of cases it gradually diminishes as one gets more used to going about among friends and acquaintances. The more a person mixes in society the more he loses his self-consciousness, which is the great reason of bashfulness.

SUFFERER.—The corn caustic you mean is, I believe, one made according to the following directions: Take 4 drachms of tincture of iodine, 12 grains of iodine of iron, 4 drachms of chloride of antimony; mix, and apply with a camel-hair brush, after paring the corn. The following is also a good remedy for hard corns: Take 1 drachm salicylic acid, 2 drops lactic acid, and 1 ounce of flexile collodion. Get the chemist to mix these ingredients for you, and then apply the lotion daily to the corn.

LANKY GIRL.—It is a great pity that you are getting so round-shouldered, for, in addition to the great drawback to one's appearance, the health undoubtedly suffers in the long run. I would strongly advise you to attend a gymnastic class during the evenings, and do some simple calisthenic exercises each morning before you finish dressing. Your work apparently necessitates your stooping to a certain extent, but it is not wise to give way to this habit of keeping the back round because it is irksome to you to straighten it. A brisk walk after business hours or early in the morning would do you good. Endeavour to keep the head well back, and step out firmly when walking, and whenever you feel the "comfortable" position returning straighten yourself at once, and keep the back up-right, or the humped appearance of which you complain will assuredly grow worse as the years go on, and the chest will contract and cause you much discomfort.

A PLAIN WOMAN.—Throw damp salt upon the carpet, then sweep it briskly, which will brighten the colours wonderfully, or sweep it well and go over it afterwards with a clean cloth and clear salt water, and the result will be nearly as satisfactory. Another way is to take a pail of cold water and add to it three gills of ox-gall. Rub it into the carpet with a soft brush. It will raise a lather which must be washed off with clean cold water. Rub dry with a clean cloth. Fuller's earth is used for cleaning carpets and a weak solution of alum or soda is used for reviving the colours.

JOHN CASTLE.—Many people believe that Ivy, trained against the walls of a dwelling-house, is productive of damp walls and general unhealthiness. The very opposite of this is really the case. If any one will carefully examine an ivy-clad wall after a shower of rain, he will observe that, while the overlapping leaves have conducted the water from point to point until it has

reached the ground, the wall underneath is quite dry. More than this, the thirsty rootlets of the stems will force their way into every crevice of the structure which will afford a firm hold and act like suckers in drawing out particles of moisture for their own nourishment. Care should be taken by means of occasional pruning that the Ivy does not force its way into the interstices of the roof or the joints of the drains. Ivy, too, renders a house cool in summer and warm in winter, and its effect cannot be otherwise than beneficial.

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